

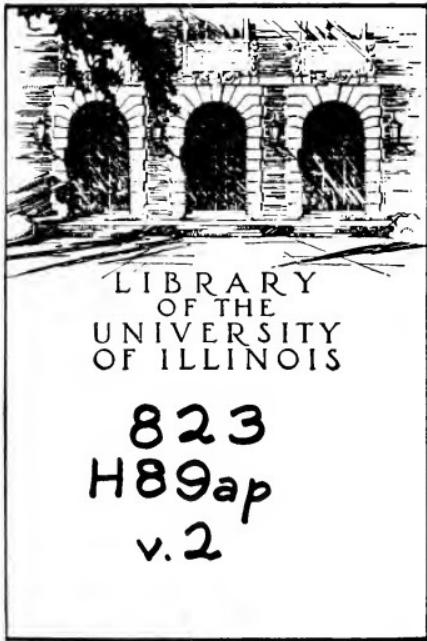
April's Lady

By

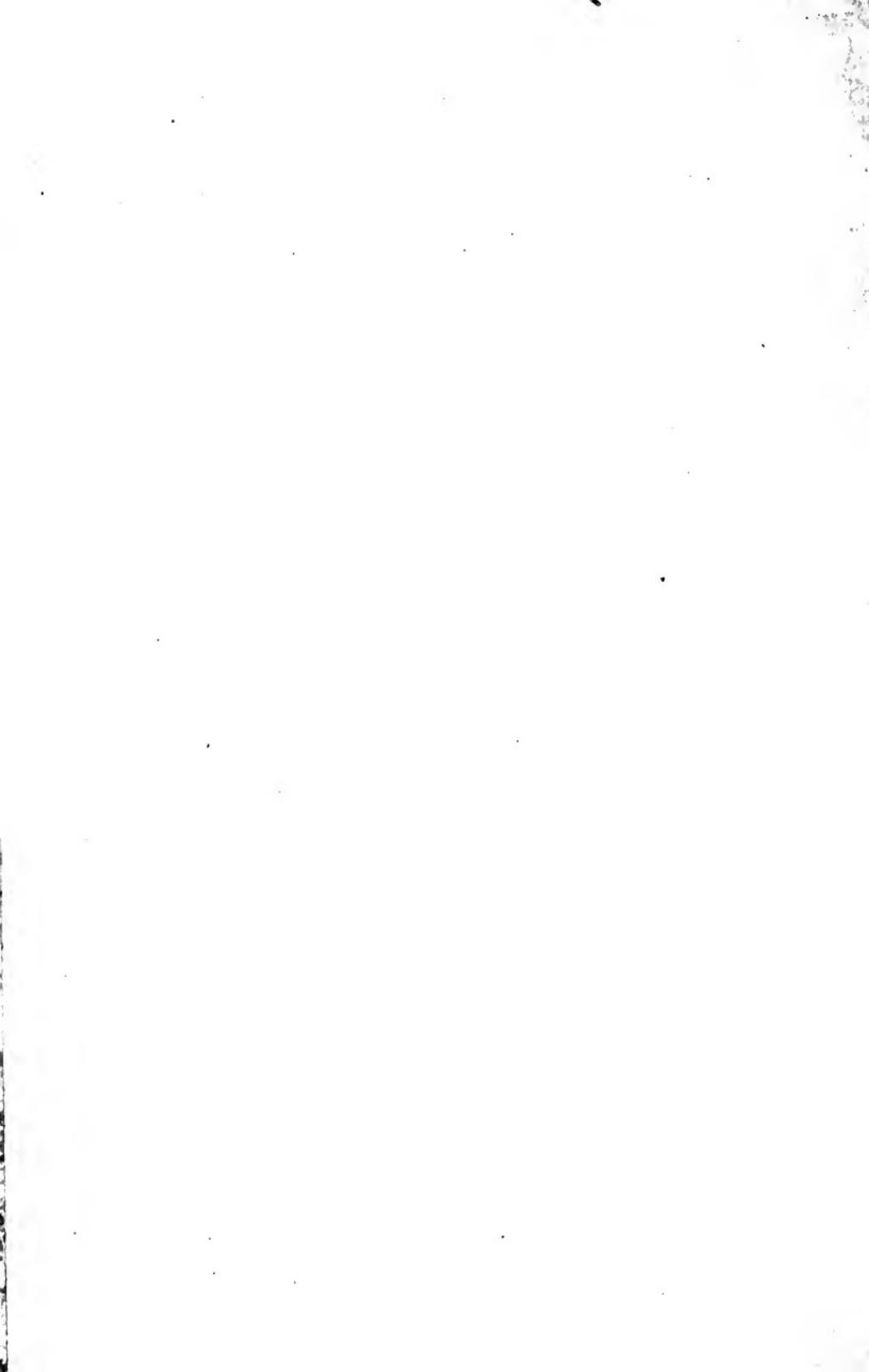
Mrs Hungerford

THE AUTHOR OF

"MOLLY BAWN"







APRIL'S LADY.

APRIL'S LADY.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. HUNGERFORD,

AUTHOR OF

"MOLLY BAWN," "PHYLLIS," "A LIFE'S REMORSE"
"HER LAST THROW," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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APRIL'S LADY.

CHAPTER I.

“A continual battle goes on in a child’s mind between what it knows and what it comprehends.”

“WELL ?” says he.

He advances even nearer, and dropping on a stone close to her, takes possession of one of her hands.

“As you can’t make up your mind to him; and as you say you *like* me, say something more.”

“*More?*”

“Yes. A great deal more. Take the next move. Say—boldly—that you will marry me !”

Joyce grows a little pale. She had certainly been prepared for this speech, had been preparing herself for it all the long

weary wakeful night, yet now that she hears it, it seems as strange, as terrible, as undesired, as though it had never suggested itself to her in its vaguest form.

“Why should I say that?” says she at last, stammering a little, and feeling somewhat disingenuous. She *had* known, yet now she is trying to pretend that she did *not* know!

“Because I ask you. You see I put the poorest reason first, and because you say I am not hateful to you, and because——”

“Well?”

“Because, when a man’s last chance of happiness lies in the balance, he will throw his very soul into the weighing of it—and knowing this, you may have pity on me.”

As though pressed down by some insupportable weight, the girl rises and makes a little curious gesture as if to free herself from it. Her face, still pale, betrays an inward struggle. After all, why cannot she

give herself to him ? Why can't she love him ? He loves her, and love, as some poor fool has said, begets love.

And he is honest. Yes, *honest !* A pang shoots through her breast. That, when all is told, is the principal thing. He is not uncertain—untrustworthy—double-faced, as *some* men are. Again that cruel pain contracts her heart. To be able to believe in a person, to be able to trust implicitly in each lightest word, to read the real meaning in every sentence, to see the truth shining in the clear eyes, this is to know peace and rest, and happiness ; and yet——

“ You know all,” says she, looking up at him, her eyes compressed, her brow frowning ; “ I am uncertain of myself, nothing seems sure to me, but if you wish it——”

“ *Wish it !* ” clasping her hands closer.

“ There is this to be said, then. I will promise to give you an answer this day twelvemonth.”

“ Twelve months ! ” says he, regarding her

with consternation—his grasp on her hands loosens.

“If the prospect frightens or displeases you, there is nothing more to be said,” rejoins she coldly. It is now she who is calm and composed, he who is nervous and anxious.

“But a whole year!”

“That or nothing,” says she, releasing her hands, with a little determined show of strength, from his. “It is for you to decide. *I don't care!*”

Perhaps she hardly grasps the cruelty that lies in this half-impatient speech, until she sees Dysart's face flush painfully.

“You need not have said that,” says he. “I know it. I am nothing to you really.” He pauses, and then says again in a low tone, “Nothing.”

“Oh, you mustn't *feel* so much!” cries she, as if tortured. “It is folly, *madness*, to feel at all in this world. What's the good of it. And to feel about me—I am not worth

it. If you would only bear that in mind, it might help you."

"If I bore that in mind I should not want to make you my wife!" returns he steadily, gravely. "Think as you will of yourself, you do not shake my faith in you. Well," with a deep breath, "I accept your terms. For a year I shall feel myself bound to you (though that is a farce, for I shall always be bound to you, soul and body), whilst you shall hold yourself free, and try to——"

"No, no. We must both be equal—both free—whilst I——" she stops short, colouring warmly, and laughing, "*what* is it I am to try to do?"

"To love me!" replies he, with infinite sadness in look and tone.

"Yes," says Joyce slowly, and then again meditatively, "yes." She lifts her eyes presently and regards him strangely. "And if all my trying should not succeed? If I never learn to love you?"

"Why then it is all over. This hope of

mine is at an end," says he, so calmly, yet with such deep melancholy, such sad foreboding, that her heart is touched.

"Oh ! it is a hope of mine too," says she quickly. "If it were not, would I listen to you to-day ? But you must not be so down-hearted ; let the worst come to the worst, you will be as well off as you are this instant."

He shakes his head.

"Does hope count for nothing then ?"

"You would *compel* me to love you," says she, growing the more vexed as she grows the more sorry for him. "Would you have me marry you, even if I did *not* love you ?" Her soft eyes have filled with tears, there is a suspicion of reproach in her voice.

"No. I suppose not."

He half turns away from her. At this moment, a sense of despair falls on him. She will never care for him, never, *never*. This proposed probation is but a mournful farce, a sorry clinging to a hope that is built on

sand. When in the future she marries, as so surely she will, *he* will not be her husband. Why not give in at once? Why fight with the impossible? Why not break all links (frail as they are sweet), and let her go her way, and he his, whilst yet there is time? To falter is to court destruction.

Then all at once a passionate reaction sets in. Joyce, looking at him, sees the light of battle, the warmth of love the unconquerable, spring into his eyes. No, he will *not* give in! He will resist to the last! dispute every inch of the ground, and if finally, only defeat is to crown his efforts, still—— And *why* should defeat be his? Be it Beauclerk or another, whoever declares himself his rival, shall find him a formidable enemy to overcome.

“Joyce,” says he quickly, turning to her and grasping her hands. “Give me my chance. Give me those twelve months: give me your thoughts now and then whilst they last. I brought you here to-day to say all

this, knowing we should be alone, undisturbed, and without——”

“Tommy ?” says she, with a little nervous laugh.

“Oh, well ! you must confess I got rid of him,” says he, smiling too, and glad in his heart to find her so cheerful. “I think if you look into it, that my stratagem, the inciting him to the overcoming of his sister in that race, was the work of a diplomatist of the first water. I quite felt that——”

A war-whoop behind him, dissolves his self-gratulations into nothing ! Here comes Tommy the valiant, flushed, triumphant, puffed beyond all description with pride and want of breath.

“I beat her, I beat her,” shrieks he, with the last note left in his tuneful pipe. He staggers the last yard or two and falls into Joyce’s arms, that are opened wide to receive him. Who shall say he is not a happy interlude ? Evidently Joyce regards him as such.

"I came back to tell you," says Tommy, recovering himself a little. "I knew," with the fearless confidence of childhood, "that you'd be longing to know if I beat her, and I *did*. She's down there now with Bridgie," pointing to the valley beneath, "and she's mad with me because I didn't let her win."

"You ought to go back to her," says Dysart, "she'll be madder if you don't."

"She won't. She's picking daisies now."

"But Bridget will want you."

"No," shaking his lovely little head. "Bridgie said : 'ye may go, sir, an' ye needn't be in a hurry back ; me an' Mikey Daly have a lot to say about me mother's daughther.'"

It would be impossible to describe the accuracy with which Tommy describes Bridget's tone and manner.

"Oh ! I daresay," says Mr. Dysart, "'Me mother's daughther' must be a truly enthral-ling person."

"I think Tommy ought to be educated for the stage," says Joyce in a little whisper.

"He'll certainly make his mark wherever he goes," says Dysart, laughing. "Tommy," after a careful examination of Monkton junior's seraphic countenance. "Don't you think you ought to take your sister on to the Court?"

"So I will," says Tommy, "in a minnit or two." He has climbed into Joyce's lap, and is now sitting on her with his arms round her neck.

To make love to a young woman, and to induce her to marry you, with a barnacle of this sort hanging round her, suggests difficulties. Mr. Dysart waits. "All things come to those who wait," says a wily old proverb. But Dysart proves this proverb a swindle.

"Now, Tommy," says he, "the two minutes are up."

"I don't care," says Tommy, "I'm tired, and Bridgie says I needn't hurry."

"The charms of Mr. Mikey Daly are no doubt great," says Dysart, mildly, "yet, I think Bridget must by this time be aware that she wasn't sent out by your mother to talk to him, but to take you and your sister to play with Bertie. Here, Tommy," decisively, "get off your aunt's lap, and run away."

"But why?" demands Tommy, aggressively. "What harm am I doing?"

"You are tiring your aunt, for one thing."

"I'm not! She likes to have me here," defiantly. "I ride 'a cock horse' every night when she's at home, don't I, Joyce? I wish *you'd* go away," wrathfully, "because then Joyce would come home and play with us again. 'Tis you," glaring at him with deep-seated anger in his eyes, "who are keeping her here!"

"Oh, no; you are wrong there," says Dysart with a sad smile. "I could not keep her anywhere; she would not stay

with me. But really, Tommy, you know you ought to go on to the Court. Poor little Bertie is looking out for you eagerly. See," plunging his hand into his pocket, "here is half-a-crown for you to spend on lollipops. I'll give it to you if you'll go back to Bridget."

Tommy's eyes brighten. But as quickly the charming blue in them darkens again. There is no tuck-shop between this and the Court.

"'Tisn't any good," says he mournfully, "the shop's away down there," pointing vaguely backwards on the journey he has come.

"You look strong in wind and limb, there is no reason to believe that the morrow's sun may not dawn on you," says Mr. Dysart. "And then think, Tommy, *think* what a joy you will be to old Molly Brien."

"Molly gives me four bull's eyes for a penny," says Tommy reflectively. "That's

two to Mabel and two to me, because mammy says baby mustn't have any for fear she'd choke. If there's four for a penny, how many is there for *this*," holding out the half-crown that lies upon his little, brown, shapely palm.

"That's a sum," says Mr. Dysart. "Tommy, you're a cruel boy ;" and having struggled with it for a moment, he says, "one hundred and twenty."

"No!" says Tommy, in a voice faint with hopeful disbelief. "Joyce, 'tisn't true, is it?"

"Quite true," says Joyce. "Just *fancy*, Tommy, one hundred and twenty bull's eyes, all in one day!"

There is such a genuine support of his desire to get rid of Tommy in her tone, that Dysart's heart rises within him.

"Tie it into my hankercher," says Tommy, without another second's hesitation. "Tie it tight, or it'll slip out and I'll lose it. Good-bye, and thank you, Mr. Dysart,"

thrusting a hot little fist into his. "I'll keep some of the hundred and twenty ones for you and Joyce."

He rushes away down the hill, eager to tell his grand news to Mabel, and presently Joyce and Dysart are alone again.

"You see you were not so clever a diplomatist as you thought yourself," says Joyce, smiling faintly; "Tommy came back."

"Tommy and I have one desire in common; we both want to be with you."

"Could you be bought off like Tommy?" says she, half-playfully. "Oh, no! Half-a-crown would not be good enough."

"Would all the riches the world contains be good enough?" says he in a voice very low, but full of emotion. "You know it would not. But you, Joyce—twelve months is a long time. You may see others—if not Beauclerk—others—and—"

"Money would not tempt me," says the girl slowly. "If money were your rival,

you would indeed be safe. You ought to know that."

"Still—Joyce——" He stops suddenly.
"May I *think* of you as Joyce? I have called you so once or twice, but——"

"You may always call me so," says she gently, if indifferently. "All my friends call me so, and you—are my friend, surely!"

The very sweetness of her manner, cold as ice as it is, drives him to desperation.

"Not your friend—your lover!" says he with sudden passion. "Joyce, think of all that I have said—all you have promised. A small matter to you perhaps—the whole world to me. You will wait for me twelve months. You will try to love me. You——"

"Yes, but there is something more to be said," cries the girl, springing to her feet as if in violent protest, and confronting him with a curious look—set—determined—a little frightened perhaps.

CHAPTER II.

“‘I thought love had been a joyous thing,’ quoth my Uncle Toby.”

* * * *

“He hath a heart as sound as a bell and his tongue is the clapper: For what his heart thinks his tongue speaks.”

“MORE ?” says Dysart, startled by her expression, and puzzled as well.

“Yes !” hurriedly, “This !” The very nervousness that is consuming her throws fire into her eyes and speech. “During all these long twelve months I shall be free. Quite free. You forgot to put that in ! You *must* remember that ! If—if I should, after all this thinking, decide on not having anything to do with you—you,” vehemently, “will have no right to reproach me. Remember,” says she, going up to him and laying her hand upon his arm, whilst the blood receding from her face leaves her very

white ; “remember, *should* such a thing occur—and it is very likely,” slowly, “I warn you of *that*—you are not to consider yourself wronged or aggrieved in any way.”

“Why should you talk to me in this way ?” begins he, aggrieved now at all events.

“ You must recollect,” feverishly, “that I have made you no promise. Not one. I refuse to ever look upon this matter as a serious thing. I tell you honestly,” her dark eyes gleaming with nervous excitement, “I don’t believe I ever *shall* so look at it. After all,” pausing, “you will do well if you now put an end to this farce between us ; and tell me to take myself and my dull life out of yours for ever.”

“I shall never tell you that,” says he in a low tone.

“ Well, well,” impatiently ; “I have warned you. It will not be my fault if—— Oh ! it is *foolish* of you !” she bursts out suddenly. “I have told you I don’t understand myself ;

and still you waste yourself—you throw yourself away. In the end you will be disappointed in me, if not in one way, in another. It hurts me to think of that. There is time still ; let us be friends—friends——” Her hands are tightly clasped, she looks at him with a world of entreaty in her beautiful eyes. “ Friends, Felix ! ” breathes she softly.

“ Let things rest as they are, I beseech you,” says he, taking her hand and holding it in a tight grasp. “ The future—who can ever say what that great void will bring us. I will trust to it ; and if only loss and sorrow be my portion, still—— As for friendship, Joyce ; whatever happens I shall be your friend and lover always.”

“ Well—you quite know,” says the girl, almost sullenly.

“ Quite. And I accept the risk. Do not be angry with me, my beloved.” He lifts the hand he holds and presses it to his lips, wondering always at the coldness of it. “ You

are free, Joyce ; you desire that it should be so, and I desire it too. I would not hamper you in any way."

" I should not be able to endure it, if —*afterwards*—I thought you were reproaching me," says she, with a little weary smile.

" Be happy about that," says he, " I shall never reproach you." He is silent for a moment, her last speech has filled him with thoughts that presently grow into extremely happy ones ; unless—unless she liked him—*cared* for him, in some decided, if vague manner, would his future misery be of so much importance to her ? Oh ! surely not ? A small flood of joy flows over him. A radiant smile parts his lips. The light of a coming triumph that shall gild and glorify his whole life illumines his eyes.

She — regarding him — grows suddenly uneasy.

" You—you fully understand," says she, drawing back from him.

"Oh ! you have made me do that," says he, but his radiant smile still lingers.

"Then why," mistrustfully, "do you look so happy ?" She draws even farther away from him. It is plain she resents that glow of happiness.

"Is there not reason ?" says he. "Have you not let me speak—and having spoken, do you not still let me linger near you ? It is more than I dared hope for ! Therefore, poor as is my chance, I rejoice now. Do not forbid me. I may have no reason to rejoice in the future. Let me, then, have my day."

"It grows very late," says Miss Kavanagh abruptly. "Let us go home."

Silently they turn and descend the hill. Halfway down he pauses and looks backwards.

"Whatever comes of it," says he, "I shall always love this spot. Though, if the year's end leaves me desolate, I hope I shall never see it again."

"It is unlucky to rejoice too soon," says she, in a low whisper.

“ Oh ! don’t say that. And that word ‘ Rejoice.’ How it reminds me of you. It ought to belong to you. It does. You should have been called ‘ Rejoice ’ instead of ‘ Joyce,’ they have cut off half your name. To see you, is to feel new life within one’s veins.”

“ Ah! I *said* you didn’t know me,” returns she sadly.

* * * * *

Meantime the hours have flown ; evening is descending. It is all very well for those who, travelling up and down romantic hills, can find engrossing matters for conversation in their idle imaginings of love, or their earnest belief therein, but to the ordinary ones of the earth, mundane comforts are still of some worth.

Tea, the all-powerful, is now holding high revelry in the library at the Court. Round the cosy tables, growing genial beneath the steam of the many old Queen Anne “ pots,” the guests are sitting singly or in groups as fancy dictateth.

"What delicious little cakes!" says Lady Swansdown, taking up a smoking morsel of cooked butter and flour from the glowing tripod beside her.

"You like them?" says Lady Baltimore in her slow, earnest way. "So does Joyce. She thinks they are the nicest little cakes in the world. By-the-bye, where is Joyce?"

"She went out for a walk at twenty minutes after two," says Beauclerk. He has pulled out his watch and is steadily consulting it.

"And it is now twenty minutes after five," says Lady Swansdown maliciously, who detests Beauclerk and who has read his relations with Joyce as clear as a book. "How she *must* have been enjoying herself!"

"Yes; but where?" asks Lady Baltimore, anxiously. Joyce has been left in her charge, and, apart from that, she likes the girl well enough to be uneasy about her when occasion arises.

"With whom? would be a more appro-

priate question," says Dicky Browne, who, as usual, is just where he ought *not* to be.

"Oh, *I* know where she is," cries a little shrill voice from the background. It comes from Tommy, and from that part of the room where Tommy and Mabel and little Bertie are having a game behind the window-curtains. Blocks, dolls, kitchens, farmyards, ninepins—*all* have been given to them as a means of keeping them quiet. One thing only has been forgotten ; the fact that the human voice divine is more attractive to them, more replete with delightful mystery, fuller of entralling possibilities than all the toys that ever yet were made.

"Thomas, are you fully alive to the responsibilities to which you pledge yourself?" demands Mr. Browne, severely.

"What?" says Tommy.

"Do you pledge yourself to declare where Miss Kavanagh is now at this moment?"

"Is it Joyce?" says Tommy, coming forward and standing undaunted in his knicker-

bockers and an immaculate collar that defies suspicion.

“Yes—Joyce,” says Mr. Browne, who never can hold his tongue.

“Well, *I* know.” Tommy pauses, and an unearthly silence falls on the assembled company. Half the county is present, and as Tommy, in the character of *raconteur*, is widely known and deservedly dreaded, expectation spreads itself amongst his audience.

Lady Baltimore moves uneasily, and for once Dicky Browne feels as if he should like to sink into his boots.

“She’s up on the top of the hill with Mr. Dysart,” says Tommy, and no more. Lady Baltimore sighs with relief, and Mr. Browne feels now as if he should like to give Tommy something.

“How do you know?” asks Beauclerk, as though he finds it impossible to repress the question.

“Because I saw her there,” says Tommy, “when Mabel and me was coming here. I

like Mr. Dysart, don't you ?" addressing Beauclerk specially. "He is a very kind sort of man. He gave me half-a-crown."

"For what, Tommy?" asks Baltimore, idly, to whom Tommy is an unfailing joy.

"To go away and leave him alone with Joyce," says Tommy, with awful distinctness.

Tableau !

Lady Baltimore lets her spoon fall into her saucer, making a little quick clatter. Everybody tries to think of something to say ; nobody succeeds.

Mr. Browne, who is evidently choking, is mercifully delivered by beneficent Nature from a sudden death. He gives way to a loud and sonorous sneeze.

"Oh, Dicky ! How funnily you *do* sneeze," says Lady Swansdown. It is a safety valve. Everybody at once affects to agree with her, and universal laughter makes the room ring.

"Tommy, I think it is time for you and

Mabel to go home," says Lady Baltimore. "I promised your mother to send you back early. Give her my love and tell her I am so sorry she couldn't come to me to-day, but I suppose last night's fatigue was too much for her."

"'Twasn't that," says Tommy; "'twas because cook——"

"Yes, yes; of course. *I know*," says Lady Baltimore, hurriedly, afraid of further revelations. "Now, say good-bye prettily, and, Bertie, you can go as far as the first gate with them."

The children made their *adieu*, Tommy reserving Dicky Browne for a last fond embrace.

"Good-bye, old man! So—long!" says Mr. Browne.

"What's that?" says Tommy, appealing to Beauclerk for information.

"What's what?" says Beauclerk, who isn't in his usual amiable mood.

"What's the meaning of that thing Dicky said to me?"

“‘ So—long ’ ? Oh, that’s Browne’s charming way of saying good-bye.”

“ Oh ! ” says Tommy, thoughtfully. He runs it through his busy brain, and brings it out at the other end satisfactorily translated. “ *I know,* ” says he. “ *Go long !* That’s what he meant ! But I think,” indignantly, “ he needn’t be rude, anyway.”

The children have hardly gone when Joyce and Dysart enter the room.

“ I hope I’m not dreadfully late,” cries Joyce, carelessly, taking off her cap, and giving her head a little light shake as if to make her pretty soft hair fall into its usual charming order. “ I have no idea what the time is.”

“ Broken your watch, Dysart ? ” asks Beauclerk in a rather nasty tone.

“ Come and sit here, dearest, and have your tea,” says Lady Baltimore, making room on the lounge beside her for Joyce, who has grown a little red.

“ It is so warm here,” says she, nervously.

That one remark of Beauclerk's having, somehow, disconcerted her. "If — if I might——"

"No, no ; you mustn't go upstairs for a little while," says Lady Baltimore, with kindly decision. "But you *may* go into the conservatory if you like," pointing to an open door off the library, that leads into a bower of sweets. "It is cooler there."

"Far cooler," says Beauclerk who has followed Joyce with a sort of determination in his genial air. "Let me take you there, Miss Kavanagh."

It is impossible to refuse. Joyce, coldly, almost disdainfully, and with her head held higher than usual, skirts the groups that line the walls on the western side of the room and disappears with him into the conservatory.

CHAPTER III.

“ Who dares think one thing and another tell,
My heart detests him as the gates of hell.”

“ A LITTLE foolish going for that walk, wasn’t it ? ” says he, leading her to a low, cushioned chair over which a gay magnolia bends its white blossoms. His manner is innocence itself: *ignorance* itself, would perhaps better express it. He has decided on ignoring everything ; though a shrewd guess that she saw something of his passages with Miss Maliphant last night, has now become almost a certainty. “ I thought you seemed rather played out, last night—fatigued—done to death. I assure you I noticed it. I could hardly,” with deep and affectionate concern, “ fail to notice anything that affected you.”

“ You are very good ! ” says Miss

Kavanagh icily. Mr. Beauclerk lets a full minute go by, and then—

“ What have I done to merit that tone from you ? ” asks he not angrily, only sorrowfully. He has turned his handsome face full on hers, and is regarding her with proud, reproachful eyes. “ It is idle to deny,” says he, with some emotion, half of which, to do him justice, is real, “ that you are changed towards me ; something has happened to alter the feelings of—of—friendship—that I dared to hope you entertained for me. I had hoped still more, Joyce—but—*What* has happened ? ” demands he suddenly, with all the righteous strength of one who, being free from guilt, resents the accusation of it.

“ Have I accused you ? ” says she coldly.

“ Yes. A thousand times, yes. Do you think your voice alone can condemn ? Your eyes are even crueler judges.”

“ Well, I am sorry,” says she faintly smiling. “ My eyes must be deceivers then. I bear you no malice, believe me.”

“ So be it,” says he, with an assumption of relief that is very well done. “ After all, I have worried myself, I daresay, very unnecessarily. Let us talk of something else. Miss Maliphant, for example,” with a little direct glance at her, and a pleasant smile. “ Nice girl, eh ? I quite miss her.”

“ She went early this morning, did she not ? ” says Joyce, scarcely knowing what to say. Her lips feel a little dry ; an agonized certainty that she is slowly growing crimson beneath his steady gaze brings the tears to her eyes.

“ *Too* early. I quite hoped to be up to see her off, but sleep had made its own of me and I failed to wake. Such a good, genuine girl ! Universal favourite, don’t you think ? *Very* honest, and very,” breaking into an apparently irrepressible laugh—“ ugly ! Ah ! well now,” with smiling self-condemnation, “ that’s really a little too bad, isn’t it ? ”

“ A great deal too bad,” says Joyce,

gravely. “ I shouldn’t speak of her like that if I were you ! ”

“ But *why*, my dear girl ? ” with arched brows, and a little gesture of his handsome hands. “ I allow her everything but beauty, and surely it would be hypocrisy to mention that in the same breath with her.”

“ It isn’t fair—it isn’t *sincere*,” says the girl almost passionately. “ Do you think I am ignorant of everything, that I did not see you with her, last night, in the garden ? Oh ! ” with a touch of supreme scorn that yet is full of pain, “ you *should* not. You should not indeed ! ”

In an instant he grows confused. Something in the lovely horror of her eyes undoes him. Only for an instant, however—after that, he turns the momentary confusion to good account.

“ Ah ! you *did* see her then, poor girl ! ” says he. “ Well I’m sorry about that for her sake.”

“ Why for her sake ? ” still regarding him

with that charming disdain. “ For your *own*, perhaps, but why for hers ? ”

Beauchlerk pauses ; then rising suddenly, stands before her. Grief and gentle indignation sit upon his massive brow. He looks the very incarnation of injured rectitude.

“ Do you know, Joyce, you have always been ready to condemn, to misjudge me.” says he in a low, hurt tone. “ I have often noticed it, yet have failed to understand why it is. I was right, you see, when I told myself last night and this morning that you were harbouring unkindly thoughts towards me. You have not been open with me, you have been wilfully secretive, and, believe me, that is a mistake. Candour, complete and perfect, is the only great virtue that will steer one clear through all the shoals and rocks of life. Be honest, aboveboard, and I can assure you, you will never regret it. You accused me just now of insincerity. Have *you* been sincere ? ”

There is a dead pause. He allows it to

last long enough to make it dramatic, and to convince himself he has impressed her, and then with a very perceptible increase of dignified pain in his voice, he goes on :

“ I feel I ought not to explain under the circumstances, but as it is to *you*”—heavy emphasis, and a second affected silence. “ You have heard perhaps of Miss Maliphant’s cousin in India ? ”

“ No,” says Joyce, after racking her brain in vain for some memory of the cousin in question. And indeed it would have been nothing short of a miracle if she could have remembered anything about that apocryphal person.

“ You will understand that I speak to you in the strictest confidence,” says Beauclerk, earnestly ; “ I wouldn’t for anything you could offer me, that it should get back to that poor girl’s ears that I had been discussing her, and the most sacred feelings of her heart. Well, there is a cousin and she—

you may have noticed that she and I were great friends?"

"Yes," says Joyce, whose heart is beating now to suffocation. Oh! has she wronged him? Does she wrong him still? Is this vile, suspicious feeling within her one to be encouraged? Is all this story of his, this simple explanation—false—false—*false?*

"I was indeed a sort of confidant of hers. Poor dear girl! it was a relief to her to talk to somebody."

"There were others."

"But none here who knew him."

"You knew him then? Is his name Maliphant too?" asks Joyce, ashamed of her cross-examination, yet driven to it by some power beyond her control.

"You mustn't ask me that," says Beauclerk playfully. "There are some things I must keep even from *you*. Though you see I go very far to satisfy your unjust suspicions of me. You can, however, guess a good deal; you—saw her crying?"

"She was not crying," says Joyce slowly, a little puzzled. Miss Maliphant to her had seemed at the moment in question very well pleased.

"No! Not when you saw her? Ah! that must have been later then;" with a sigh, "you see now I am betraying more than I should. However, I can depend upon your silence. It will be a small, precious secret between you and me."

"And Miss Maliphant," says Joyce, coldly. "As for me, what *is* the secret?"

"You haven't understood? Not really? Well, between you and me and the wall," with delightful gaiety, "I think she gives a thought or two to that cousin. I fancy," whispering, "she is even in — eh? — you know."

"I don't," says Joyce slowly, who is now longing to believe in him, and yet is held steadily backward by some strong inward feeling.

"I believe she is in love with him," says

Beauclerk, still in a mysterious whisper. "But it is a sore subject," with an expressive frown. "Not best pleased when it is mentioned to her. *Mauvais sujet*, you understand. But girls are often foolish in that way. Better say nothing about it."

"I shall say nothing of course," says Joyce. "Why should I? It is nothing to me, though I am sorry for her."

Yet as she says this a doubt arises in her mind as to whether she need be sorry. *Is* there a cousin in India? Could that big, jolly lively girl, who had come into the conservatory with Beauclerk last night, with the light of triumph in her eyes, be the victim of an unhappy love affair. Should she write and ask her if there is a cousin in India? Oh, no, *no!* She could not do that! How horrible, how hateful to distrust him like this! What a detestable mind must be hers. And besides, why dwell so much upon it. Why not accept him as a pleasing acquaintance. One with whom to pass a

pleasant hour now and then. Why ever again regard him as a possible lover !

A little shudder runs through her. At this moment it seems to her that she could never really have so regarded him. And yet only last night—

And *now*. What is it ? Does she still doubt ? Will that strange, curious, tormenting feeling that once she knew for him return no more. Is it gone for ever ? Oh ! that it *might* be so !

CHAPTER IV.

“So over violent, or over civil!”

“A man so various.”

“DULL looking day,” says Dicky Browne, looking up from his broiled kidney to glare indignantly through the window at the grey sky outside.

“It can’t be always May,” says Beauclerk cheerfully, whose point it is to take ever a lenient view of things. Even to Heaven itself he is kind, and holds out a helping hand.

“I expect it is we ourselves who are dull,” says Lady Baltimore, looking round the breakfast-table, where now many vacant seats make the edges bare. Yesterday morning Miss Maliphant left. To-day the Clontarfs, and one or two strange men from the barracks in the next town. Desertion indeed

seems to be the order of the day. "We grow very small," says she laughing. "How I miss people when they go away."

"Do you mean that as a liberal bribe for the getting rid of the rest of us," says Dicky, who is now devoting himself to the hot scones. "If so, let me tell you it isn't good enough. I shall stay here until you choose to cross the Channel. I don't *want* to be missed."

"That will be next week," says Lady Baltimore. "I do beseech all here present not to forsake me until then."

"I must deny your prayer," says Lady Swansdown. "These tiresome lawyers of mine say they must see me on Thursday at the latest."

"I shall meet you in town at Christmas, however," says Lady Baltimore, making the remark a question.

"I hardly think so. I have promised the Barings to join them in Italy about then."

"Well here then, in February."

Lady Swansdown smiles at her hostess, but makes no audible reply.

"I suppose we ought to do something to-day," says Lady Baltimore presently, in a listless tone. It is plain to everybody, however, that in reality she wants to do nothing. "Suggest something, Dicky."

"Skittles," says that youth, without a hesitation. Very properly, however, no one takes any notice of him.

"I was thinking that if we went to 'Connor's Cross,' it would be a nice drive," says Lady Baltimore, still struggling with her duties as a hostess. "What do you say, Beatrice?"

"I pray you, excuse me," says Lady Swansdown. "As I leave to-morrow, I must give the afternoon to the answering of several letters, and to other things besides."

"Connor's Cross," says Joyce idly. "I've so often heard of it. Yet, oddly enough, I have never seen it; it is always the way, isn't it, whenever one lives very close to some celebrated spot."

"Celebrated or not, it is at least lovely," says Lady Baltimore. "You really *ought* to see it."

"I'll drive you there this afternoon, Miss Kavanagh," says Beauclerk in his friendly way, that, in public, has never a tincture of tenderness about it. "We might start after luncheon. It is only about ten miles off. Eh ?" to Baltimore.

"Ten," briefly.

"I am right then," equably ; "we might easily do it in a little over an hour."

"Hour and a half with best horse in the stables. Bad road," says Baltimore.

"Even so we shall get there and back in excellent time," says Beauclerk, deaf to his brother-in-law's gruffness. "Will you come, Miss Kavanagh ?"

"I should like it," says Joyce, in a hesitating sort of way ; "but——"

"Then why not go, dear ?" says Lady Baltimore kindly. "The Morroghs of Creaghtown live not half-a-mile from it, and they

will give you tea if you feel tired ; Norman is a very good whip, and will be sure to have you back here in proper time."

Dysart lifting his head looks full at Joyce.

"At that rate——" says she, smiling at Beauclerk.

"It is settled then," says Beauclerk pleasantly. "Thank you ever so much for helping me to get rid of my afternoon in so delightful a fashion."

"It is going to rain. It will be a wet evening," says Dysart abruptly.

"Oh, my dear fellow ! You can hardly be called a weather-prophet," says Beauclerk banteringly. "You ought to know that a *settled* grey sky like that seldom means rain."

No more is said about it then, and no mention is made of it at luncheon. At half-past two precisely, however, a dog-cart comes round to the hall door. Joyce running lightly downstairs, habited for a drive, meets Dysart at the foot of the staircase.

"Do not go," says he abruptly.

"Not go—*now*," with a glance at her costume.

"I didn't believe you *would* go," says he vehemently. "I didn't believe it possible—or I should have spoken sooner. Nevertheless, at this last moment, I entreat you to give it up."

"Impossible," says she curtly, annoyed by his tone, which is perhaps, unconsciously, a little dictatorial.

"You refuse me?"

"It is not the question. I have said I would go. I see no reason for not going. I decline to make myself foolish in the eyes of everybody by drawing back at the last moment."

"You have forgotten everything then," says he.

"I don't know," coldly, "that there is anything to remember."

"Oh?" bitterly, "not so far as I am concerned. I count for nothing. I allow

that. But he—I fancied you had at least read him."

"I think, perhaps, there was nothing to read," says she, lowering her eyes.

"If you can think *that*, it is useless my saying anything further."

He moves to one side as if to let her pass, but she hesitates; perhaps she would have said something to soften her decision, but—a rare thing with him—he loses his temper. Seeing her standing there before him, so sweet, so lovely, so indifferent, as he tells himself, his despair overcomes him.

"I have a voice in this matter," says he, frowning heavily. "I *forbid* you to go with that fellow."

A sharp change crosses Miss Kavanagh's face. All the sudden softness dies out of it. She stoops leisurely, and disengaging the end of the black lace round her throat from an envious banister that would have detained her, without further glance or

word for Dysart, she goes up the hall and through the open doorway. Beauclerk, who has been waiting for her outside, comes forward. A little spring seats her in the cart. Beauclerk jumps in beside her. Another moment sees them out of sight.

* * * *

The vagrant sun that all day long had been coming and going in fitful fashion, has suddenly sunk behind the thunderous grey cloud that, rising from the sea, now spreads itself o'er hill and vale. The light has died out of the sky ; dull muttering sounds come rumbling down from the distant mountains. The vast expanse of barren bog upon the left has become almost obscure. Here and there a glint of its watery wastes may be seen—but indistinctly, giving the eye a mournful impression of “ lands forlorn.”

A strange hot quiet seems to have fallen upon the trembling earth.

" We often see, against some storm,
A silence in the heavens, the wrack stand still,
The bold wind speechless, and the orb below
Is hush'd as death."

Just now that "boding silence reigns." A sense of fear falls on Joyce, she scarcely knows why, as her companion, with a quick lash of the whip, urges the horse up the steep hill. They are still several miles from their destination, and though it is only four o'clock, it is no longer day. The heavens are black as ink, the trees upon the roadside are shivering in expectant misery.

"What is it?" says Joyce, and even as she asks the question it is answered. The storm is upon them in all its fury. All at once, without an instant's warning, a violent downpour of rain comes from the bursting clouds, threatening to deluge them.

"We are in for it," says Beauclerk in a sharp, short tone, so unlike his usual dulcet accents that even now, in her sudden discomfort, it startles her. The rain is descending in torrents, a wild wind has arisen.

The light has so far faded that now the day resembles nothing so much as the dull beginning of a winter's night.

"Have you any idea where we are?" asks Beauclerk presently.

"None. You know I told you I had never been here before. But you—*you* must have some knowledge of it."

"How should I? These detestable Irish isolations are as yet unknown paths to me."

"But I thought you said—you gave me the impression that you knew Connor's Cross."

"I regret it if I did," shortly. The rain is running down his neck by this time, leaving a cold, drenched collar to add zest to his rising ill-temper. "I had *heard* of Connor's Cross. I never saw it. I devoutly hope," with a snarl, "I never shall."

"I don't think you are likely to," says Joyce, whose own temper is beginning to be slightly ruffled.

"Well, this *is* a sell!" says Beauclerk.

He is buttoning up a heavy ulster round his handsome form. He is very particular about the fastening of the last button—that one that goes under the chin—and having satisfactorily accomplished it, and found, by a careful moving backwards and forwards of his head, that it is comfortably adjusted, it occurs to him to see if his companion is weather-proof.

“Got wraps enough?” asks he. “No, by Jove! Here, put on this,” dragging a warm cloak of her own from under the seat and offering it to her with all the air of one making a gift. “What is it? Coat—cloak—ulster? One never knows what women’s clothes are meant for.”

“To cover them,” says Joyce calmly.

“Well, put it on. By Jove! how it pours! All right now?” having carelessly flung it round her, without regard for where her arms ought to go through the sleeves. “Think you can manage the rest by yourself! So beastly difficult to do anything

in a storm like this, with this brute tugging at the reins and the rain running up one's sleeve."

"I can manage it very well myself, thank you," says Joyce, giving up the finding of the sleeves as a bad job ; after a futile effort to discover their whereabouts, she buttons the cloak across her chest and sits beside him, silent, but shivering. A little swift, wandering thought of Dysart makes her feel even colder. If *he* had been here ! Would she be thus roughly entreated ? Nay, rather would she not have been a mark for tenderest care—a precious charge entrusted to his keeping. A thing beloved and therefore to be cherished.

"Look *there*," says she suddenly, lifting her head and pointing a little to the right. "Surely, even through this denseness, I see lights. Is it a village ?"

"Yes—a village, I should say," grimly. "A hamlet, rather. Would you," ungraciously, "suggest our seeking shelter there?"

"I think it must be the village called 'Falling,'" says she, too pleased at her discovery to care about his gruffness, "and if so, the owner of the inn there was an old servant of my father's. She often comes over to see Barbara and the children, and though I have never come here to see her, I know she lives somewhere in this part of the world. A good creature she is. The kindest of women."

"An inn," says Beauclerk, deaf to the virtues of the old servant, the innkeeper, but altogether alive to the fact that she keeps an inn. "What a blessed oasis in our wilderness ! And it can't be more than half a mile away. Why," recovering his usual delightful manner, "we shall find ourselves housed in no time. I *do* hope, my dear girl, you are comfortable ! Wrapped up to the chin, eh ? Quite right—quite right. After all, the poor driver has the worst of it. He *must* face the elements, whatever happens. Now you, with your dear little

chin so cosily hidden from the wind and rain, and with hardly a suspicion of the blast I am fighting, make a charming picture—really *charming!* Ah, you girls! you have the best of it beyond doubt! And why not? It is the law of nature—weak woman and strong man! You know those exquisite lines——”

“Can’t that horse go faster?” says Miss Kavanagh, breaking in on this little speech in a rather ruthless manner. “Lapped in luxury as you evidently believe me, I still assure you I should gladly exchange my present condition for a good, wholesome kitchen fire.”

“Always practical. Your charm—*one* of them,” says Mr. Beauclerk. But he takes the hint, nevertheless, and presently they draw up before a small, dingy, but distinct place of shelter.

Not a man is to be seen. The village, a collection of fifty houses when all is told, is swept and garnished. A few geese are stalk-

ing up the street, uttering creaking noises. Some ducks are swimming in a glad astonishment down the muddy streams running by the edges of the kerb-stones. Such a delicious wealth of filthy water has not been seen in Falling for the past three dry months.

“The deserted village with a vengeance,” says Beauclerk. He has risen in his seat and placed his whip in the stand with a view of descending and arousing the inhabitants of this Sleepy Hollow, when a shock head is thrust out of the inn (“hotel,” rather, as is painted on a huge sign-post over the door) and being instantly withdrawn again with a muttered “Och a-yea,” is followed by a resounding shriek for :

“Mrs. Connolly—Mrs. Connolly, ma’am ! Sure, ‘tis yourself that’s wanted ! Come down, I tell ye ! There’s ginthry at the door, an’ the rain peltin’ on ‘em like the divil. Come down, I’m tellin’ ye ! Or fegs they’ll go on to Paddy Sheehan’s, an’ thin where’ll ye be ? Och, murdher ! Where are ye, at all,

at all? 'Tis ruined ye'll be intirely wid the stayin' of ye!"

"Arrah, hould yer whist, y' omadhaun o' the world," says another voice, and in a second a big, buxom, jolly, hearty-looking woman appears on the threshold, peering a little suspiciously through the gathering gloom at the dog-cart outside. First she catches sight of the crest and coronet, and a gleam of pleased intelligence brightens her face. Then, lifting her eyes, she meets those of Joyce, and the sudden pleasure gives way to actual and honest joy.

"It is I, Mrs. Connolly," says Joyce, in a voice that is supposed to accompany a smile, but has in reality something of tears in it.

Mrs. Connolly, regardless of the pelting rain and her best cap, takes a step forward.

CHAPTER V.

“All is not golde that outward shewith bright.”

“I love everything that’s old—*Old friends*, old times, old manners, old books, old wine.”

“An’ is it you, Miss Joyce? Glory be! What a day to be out! ’Tis drenched y’are, intirely! Oh! come in, me dear—come in, me darlin’! Here Mikey, Paddy, Jerry!—come here, ivery mother’s son o’ ye, an’ take Mr. Beauclerk’s horse from him. Oh! by the laws!—but y’are soaked! Arrah, what misfortune dhrove y’out to-day, of all days, Miss Joyce? Was there niver a man to tell ye that ’twould be a peltin’ storm before night-fall?”

There had been *one*. How earnestly Miss Kavanagh now wishes she had listened to his warning.

“It looked so fine two hours ago,” says she,

clambering down from the dog-cart with such misguided help from the ardent Mrs. Connolly, as almost lands her with the ducks in the muddy stream below.

“Och ! there’s no more depindince to be placed upon the weather than there is upon a man. However, ’tis welcome y’are, anyway. Your father’s daughther is dear to me—yes, come this way—up these stairs. ’Tis Anne Connolly is proud to be enthertainin’ one o’ yer blood inside her door.”

“Oh ! I’m so glad I found you,” says Joyce, turning when she has reached Mrs. Connolly’s bedroom to imprint upon that buxom widow’s cheek a warm kiss. “It was a long way here—long, and so cold and wet.”

“An’ where were ye goin’ at all, if I may ax ?” says Mrs. Connolly, taking off the girl’s dripping outer garments.

“To see Connor’s Cross——”

“Faith, ’twas little ye had to do ! A musty ould tomb like that wid nothin’ but broken stones around it. Wouldn’t the bran-

new graveyard below there do ye ? Musha ! but 'tis quare the ginthry is ! Och ! me dear, 'tis dhreadful wet y'are, there isn't a dhry stitch on ye."

"I don't think I'm wet once my coats are off," says Joyce, and indeed, when those invaluable wraps are removed, it is proved beyond doubt—even Mrs. Connolly's doubt, which is strong—that her gown is quite dry.

" You see, it was such a *sudden* rain," says Joyce, " and fortunately we saw the lights in this village almost immediately after it began."

" Fegs, too suddint to be pleasant," says Mrs. Connolly. "'Twas well the early darkness made us light up so quickly, or ye might have missed us, not knowin' yer road. An' how's all wid ye, my dear—Miss Barbara, an' the masther, an' the darling childher ? I've a Brammy cock and a hen that I'm thinkin' of takin' down to Masther Tommy this two weeks, but the ould mare is mighty quare on her legs o' late. Are ye all well ? "

" Quite well, thank you, Mrs. Connolly."

"Wisha—God keep ye so."

"And how are all of you? When did you hear from America?"

"Last month thin—devil a less; an' the greatest news of all! A letter from Johnny—me eldest boy—wid a five-pound note in it, an' a picther of the girl he's goin' to marry. I declare to ye when that letter came I just fell into a chair an' tuk to laughin' an' cryin' till that ounchal of a girl in the kitchen began to bate me on the back, thinkin' I was bad in a fit. To think, me dear, of little Johnneen I used to nurse on me knee, thinkin' of takin' a partner. An' a strappin' fine girl too, fegs, wid cheeks like turnips. But there, now, I'll show her to ye by-an'-bye. She's a raal beauty if them porthraits be thtrue, but there's a lot o' lies comes from over the wather. An' what'll ye be takin' now, Miss Joyce, dear?" —with a return to her hospitable mood—"A drop o' hot punch, now? Whisky is the finest thing out for givin' the good-bye to the cowld."

"Oh, *no*, thank you, Mrs. Connolly"—hastily—"if I might have a cup of tea, I——"

"Arrah, bad cess to that tay ! What's the good of it at all at all to a frozen stomach ? Cowld pison, I calls it. Well, there ! Have it your own way ! An' come along down wid me, now, an' give yerself to the enthertainin' of Misther Beauclerk, whilst I wet the pot. Glory ! what a man he is !—the size o' the house ! A fine man, in airnest. Tell me now," with a shrewd glance at Joyce, "is there anything betwixt you and him ?"

"Nothing !" says Joyce, surprised even herself by the amount of vehement denial she throws into this word.

"Oh, well, there's others ! An' Mr. Dysart would be more to my fancy. *There's* a nate man, if ye like, be me fegs !" with a second half sly, wholly kindly, glance at the girl. "If 'twas *he*, now, I'd give ye me blessin' wid a heart an' a half. An' indeed, now, Miss Joyce, 'tis time ye were thinkin' o' settlin'."

"Well, I'm not thinking of it this time," says Joyce, laughing, though a little catch in her throat warns her she is not far from tears. Perhaps Mrs. Connolly hears that little catch too, for she instantly changes her tactics.

"Faith, an' 'tis right y're, me dear. There's a deal o' throuble in marriage, an' 'tis too young y're intirely to undhertake the likes of it," says she, veering round with a scandalous disregard for appearances. "My, what hair ye have, Miss Joyce ! 'Tis improved, it is, even since last I saw ye. I'm a great admirer of a good head o' hair."

"I wonder when will the rain be over ?" asks Joyce, wistfully gazing through the small window at the threatening heavens.

"If it's my opinion y're asking," says Mrs. Connolly, "I'd say not till to-morrow mornin'."

"Oh ! Mrs. Connolly !" turning a distressed face to that good creature.

" Well, me dear, what can I say but what I think ? " flinging out her ample arms in self-justification. " Would ye have me lie to ye ? Why, a sky like that always——"

Here a loud crash of thunder almost shakes the small inn to its foundations.

" The heavens be good to us ! " says Mrs. Connolly, crossing herself devoutly. " Did ye iver hear the like o' that ? "

" But—it can't last—it is impossible," says Joyce vehemently. " Is there no covered car in the town ? Couldn't a man be persuaded to drive me home if I promised him to——"

" If ye promised him a king's ransom, ye couldn't get a covered car to-night," says Mrs. Connolly. " There's only one in the place an' that belongs to Mike Murphy, an' 'tis off now miles beyant Skibbereen, attindin' the funeral o' Father John Maguire. 'Twon't be home till to-morrow anyway, an' faix, I wouldn't wondher if it wasn't here then, for every mother's son at that

wake will be as dhrunk as fiddlers to-night. Father John, ye know, me dear, was greatly respected."

"Are you *sure* there isn't another car anywhere?"

"Quite positive. But why need ye be so unaisy, Miss Joyce dear? sure 'tis safe an' sure y're wid me."

"But what will they think at home and at the Court?" says Joyce faltering.

"Arrah! what *can* they think, miss, but that the rain was altogether too mastherful for ye? Ye know, me dear, we can't (even the best of us) conthrol the ilimints!" This incontrovertible fact Mrs. Connolly gives forth, with a truly noble air of resignation. "Come down now, and let me get ye that palthry cup o' tay y're cravin for."

She leads Joyce downstairs, and into a snug little parlour, with a roaring fire that is not altogether unacceptable this dreary evening. The smell of stale tobacco smoke that pervades it is a drawback, but if you

come to think of it, we can't have everything in this world.

Perhaps Joyce has more than she wants. It occurs to her, as Beauclerk turns round from the solitary window, that she could well have dispensed with his society. That lurking distrust of him she had known vaguely, but kept under during all their acquaintance, has taken a permanent place in her mind during her drive with him this afternoon.

"Oh ! here you are. Beastly smoky hole !" says Mr. Beauclerk, taking no notice of Mrs. Connolly, who is doing her best curtsey in the doorway.

"I think it looks very comfortable," says Joyce, with a gracious smile at her hostess, and a certain sore feeling at her heart. Once again her thoughts fly to Dysart. Would that have been *his* first remark when she appeared after so severe a wetting ?

"'Tis just what I've been sayin' to Miss Kavanagh, sir," says Mrs. Connolly, with

unabated good humour. “The heavens above is always too much for us. We can’t turn off the wather up there as we can the cock in the kitchen sink. Still, there’s compinsations always, glory be ! An’ what will ye plaze have wid yer tay, miss ?” turning to Joyce with great respect in look and tone. In spite of all her familiarity with her upstairs, she now, with a looker-on, proceeds to treat “her young lady,” as though she were a stranger and of blood royal.

“Anything you have, Mrs. Connolly,” says Joyce. “Only—*don’t be long!*” There is undoubted entreaty in the request. Mrs. Connolly, glancing at her, concludes it is not so much a desire for what will be brought, as for the bringer that animates the speaker.

“Give me five minutes, miss, an’ I’ll be back again,” says she pleasantly. Leaving the room, she stands in the passage outside for a moment, and solemnly moves her kindly head from side to side. It takes her

but a little time to make up her shrewd Irish mind on several points.

“While this worthy person is getting you your tea, I think I'll take a look at the weather from outside,” says Mr. Beauclerk, turning to Joyce. It is evident he is eager to avoid a *tête-à-tête*, but this does not occur to her.

“Yes—do—do,” says she, nevertheless with such a liberal encouragement as puzzles him. Women are kittle cattle however, he tells himself; better not to question their motives too closely or you will find yourself in Queer Street. He gets to the door with a cheerful assumption of going to study the heavens that entirely conceals his desire for a cigar and a brandy and soda, but on the threshold Joyce speaks again.

“Is there no chance—would it not be possible to get home?” says she, in a tone that trembles with nervous longing.

“I'm afraid not. I'm just going to see.

It is impossible weather for you to be out at all events."

"But you——? It is clearing a little, isn't it?" with a despairing glance out of the window. "If you could manage to get back and tell them that——"

She is made thoroughly ashamed of her selfishness a moment later.

"But my dear girl, consider! Why should I tempt a severe attack of inflammation of the lungs by driving ten or twelve miles through this unrelenting torrent! We are very well out of it here. This Mrs.—er—Connor—Connolly seems a very respectable person, and is known to you. I shall tell her to make you as comfortable as her 'limited liabilities,' with quite a little merry laugh at his own wit, "will allow."

"Pray tell her nothing. Do not give yourself so much trouble," says Joyce calmly. "She will do the best she can for me without the intervention of anyone."

"As you will, *au revoir!*!" says he,

waving her a graceful farewell for the moment.

He is not entirely happy in his mind, as he crosses the tiny hall and makes his way first to the bar and afterwards to the open doorway. Like a cat, he hates rain ! To drive back through this turmoil of wind and wet for twelve long miles to the Court is more than his pleasure-loving nature can bear to look upon. Yet to remain has its drawbacks too.

If Miss Maliphant, for example, were to hear of this escapade there might be trouble *there*. He has not as yet finally made up his mind to give inclination the go-by, and surrender himself to sordid considerations, but there can be no doubt that the sordid things of this life have, with some natures, a charm hardly—if ever—to be rivalled successfully by mere beauty.

The heiress is attractive in one sense ; Joyce equally so in another. Miss Maliphant's charms are golden—are not Joyce's

more golden still ? And yet, to give up Miss Maliphant—to break with her *finally* —to throw away deliberately a good £10,000 a year——!

He lights his cigar with an untrembling hand, and having found it to his satisfaction permits his steady mind to continue its investigations.

£10,000 a year ! A great help to a man ; yet he is glad at this moment that he is free to accept or reject it. Nothing definite has been said to the heiress—nothing definite to Joyce either. It strikes him at this moment, as he stands in the dingy doorway of the inn and stares out at the descending rain, that he has shown distinct cleverness in the way in which he has manœuvred these two girls, without either of them feeling the least suspicion of the other. Last night Joyce had been *on the point* of a discovery, but he had smoothed away all that. Evidently he was born to be a successful diplomatist, and if that

appointment he has been looking for ever comes his way he will be able to show the world a thing or two.

How charming that little girl in there can look ! And never more so than when she allows her temper to overcome her. She had been angry just now. Yes. But he can read between the lines ; angry, naturally, that he has not come to the point —declared himself—*proposed* as the saying is. Well—puffing complacently at his cigar—she must wait — she must wait — if the appointment comes off, if Sir Alexander stands to him, she has a very good chance —but if that falls through, why *then*—

And it won't do to encourage her too much, by Jove ! If Miss Maliphant were to hear of this evening's adventure, she is headstrong, stolid enough, to mark out a line for herself and fling him aside without waiting for judge or jury. Much as it might cost her, she would not hesitate to break all ties with him, and any that existed

were very slight. He, himself, had kept them so. Perhaps, after all, he had better order the trap round, leave Miss Kavanagh here, and——

And yet to go out in that rain ; to feel it beating against his face for two or three intolerable hours. Was anything, even £10,000 a year, worth that ? He would be a drowned rat by the time he reached the Court.

And, after all, couldn't it be arranged without all this bother ? He might easily explain it all away to Miss Maliphant, even should some kind friend tell her of it. That was his *rôle*. He had quite a talent for explaining away. But he must also make Joyce thoroughly understand. She was a sensible girl. A word to her would be sufficient. Just a word to show that marriage *at present* was out of the question. Nothing unpleasant ; nothing *finite* ; but just some little thing to waken her to the true state of the case. Girls, as a rule,

were sentimental, and would expect much of an adventure such as this. But Joyce was proud—he liked that in her. There would be no trouble ; she would *quite* understand.

“ Tea is just comin’ up, sorr ! ” says a rough voice behind him. “ The mistress tould me to tell ye so ! ”

The red-headed Abigail who attends on Mrs. Connolly beckons him, with a grimy forefinger, to the repast within. He accepts the invitation.

CHAPTER VI.

“It is the mynd that maketh good or ill,
That maketh wretch or happy, rich or poore.”

As he enters the inn parlour he finds Joyce sitting by the fire listening to Mrs. Connolly, who, armed with a large tray, is advancing up the room towards the table. Nobody but the “mistress” herself is allowed to wait upon “the young lady.”

“An’ I hope, Miss Joyce, ’twill be to your liking. An’ sorry I am, sir,” with a courteous recognition of Beauclerk’s entrance, “that ’tis only one poor fowl I can give ye. But thim commercial thravellers are the devil. They’d lave nothing behind ’em if they could help it. Still, miss,” with a loving smile at Joyce, “I *do* think ye’ll like the ham. ’Tis me own curing, an’ I brought ye just a taste o’ this year’s

honey ; ye'd always a sweet tooth from the time ye were born."

"I could hardly have had a tooth before that," says Joyce, laughing. "Oh, thank you, Mrs. Connolly ; it is a *lovely* tea, and it is very good of you to take all this trouble."

"Who'd be welcome to any throuble if 'twasn't yerself, miss ?" says Mrs. Connolly, bowing and retreating towards the door.

A movement on the part of Joyce checks her. The girl has made an impulsive step as if to follow her, and now, seeing Mrs. Connolly stop short, holds out to her one hand.

"But, Mrs. Connolly," says she, trying to speak naturally, and succeeding very well, so far as careless ears are in question. But the "misthress" marks the false note, "you will stay and pour out tea for us ; you *will* ?"

There is extreme entreaty in her tone ; the stronger in that it has to be suppressed.

Mrs. Connolly, halting midway between the table and the door with the tray in her hands, hears it, and a sudden light comes, not only into her eyes, but her mind.

"Why, if you wish it, miss," says she directly. She lays down the tray, standing it up against the wall, and coming back to the table calmly lifts the teapot and begins to fill the cups.

"Ye take sugar, sir?" asks she of Beauclerk, who is a little puzzled, but not altogether displeased at the turn affairs have taken. After all, as he has told himself a thousand times, Joyce is a clever girl. She is determined not to betray the anxiety for his society, that beyond question she is feeling. And this prudence on her part will relieve him of many small embarrassments. Truly, she is a girl not to be found every day.

He is accordingly most gracious to Mrs. Connolly; praises her ham, extols her tea, says wonderful things about the delicacy of her chicken.

When tea is at an end, he rises gracefully and expresses his desire to smoke one more cigar and have a last look at the weather.

" You will be able to put us up ?" says he.

" Oh, yes, sir, sure."

He smiles beautifully, and with a benevolent request to Joyce to take care of herself in his absence, leaves the room.

" He's a dale o' talk," says Mrs. Connolly, the moment his back is turned. She is now sure that Joyce has some private grudge against him, or at all events is not what she herself would call "*partial* to him."

" Yes," says Joyce. " He is very conversational. *How* it rains still."

" Yes, it does," says Mrs. Connolly comfortably. She is not at all put out by the girl's reserved manner, having lived amongst the "ginthry" for many years, and being well up to their "quare ways." A thought, however, that has been formulating in her mind for a long time past—ever since, indeed, she found her young lady could not

return home until morning—now compels her to give the conversation a fresh turn.

"I've got to apologise to ye, miss, but since ye must stay the night wid me, I'm bound to tell ye, I have no room for ye but a little one leadin' out o' me own."

"Are you so very full then, Mrs. Connolly? I'm glad to hear that for your sake."

"Full to the chin, me dear. Thim commercials always ddrop down upon one just whin laste wanted."

"Then I suppose I ought to be thankful that you can give me a room at all?" says Joyce, laughing. "I'm afraid I shall be a great trouble to you."

"Ne'er a scrap in life, me dear. 'Tis proud I am to be of any sarvice to ye. An' perhaps 'twill make ye aisier in yer mind to know as you're undher my protection, and that no gossip can come nigh ye."

The good woman means well, but she has flown rather above Joyce's head, or rather under her feet.

"I'm delighted to be with you," says Miss Kavanagh, with a pretty smile. "But as for protection—*well*, the Land Leaguers round here are not so bad as that one should fear for one's life in a quiet village like this."

"There's worse than Land Leaguers," says Mrs. Connolly, who is, of course, thoroughly in sympathy with that murderous clique, as are all the Roman Catholic Irish lower classes, however good and kindly and moral they may be. There is no use in disguising *that* fact. "There's thim who talk."

"Talk—of *what*?" asks Joyce a little vaguely.

"Well now, me dear, sure ye haven't lived so long widout knowin' there's cruel people in the world," says Mrs. Connolly anxiously. "An' the fact o' you goin' out dhrivin' wid Mr. Beauclerk, an' stayin' out the night wid him, might give rise to the talk I'm fightin' agin. Don't be angry wid me now, Miss

Joyce, an' don't fret yourself, but 'tis as well to prepare ye."

Joyce's heart as she listens seems to die within her. A kind of sick feeling renders her speechless ; she had never thought of that—of—the idea of impropriety being suggested as part of this most unlucky escapade. Mrs. Connolly, noting the girl's white face, feels as though she ought to have cut her tongue out rather than have spoken, yet she had done all for the best.

"Miss Joyce, don't think about it," says she hurriedly. "I'm sorry I said a word, but—. An' afther all I am right, me dear. 'Tis betther for ye when evil tongues are waggin' to have a raal friend like me to yer back to say the needful word. Ye'll sleep wid me to-night, an' I'll take ye back to her ladyship in the morning, an' never leave ye till I see ye in safe hands once more. If ye *liked* him," pointing to the door through which Beauclerk had gone, "I'd say nothing, for thin all would come

right enough. But as it is, I'll take it on meself to be the nurse to ye now that I was when ye were a little purty creature creeping along the floor."

Joyce smiles at her, but rather faintly. A sense of terror is oppressing her. Lady Baltimore, what will *she* think? And Freddy and Barbara! They will all be angry with her! Oh! *more* than angry—they will think she has done something that other girls would not have done. How is she to face them again? The entire party at the Court seems to spread itself before her. Lady Swansdown and Lord Baltimore, they will laugh about it; and the others will laugh and whisper, and—.

Felix—Felix Dysart. What will he think? What is he thinking now? As though to follow out this thought is intolerable to her she rises abruptly.

"What o'clock is it, Mrs. Connolly," says she in a hard, strained voice. "I am tired. I should like to go to bed now."

"Just eight, miss. An' if you're tired there's nothing like the bed. Ye will like to say good-night to Mr. Beauclerk?"

"Oh, no, *no!*!" with frowning sharpness. Then recovering herself, "I need not disturb him, you will tell him that I was overdone—chilled—tired."

"I'll tell him all he ought to know," says Mrs. Connolly. "Come, Miss Joyce, everything is ready for ye. An' a lie down and a good sleep will be the makin' of ye before morning."

Joyce, to her surprise, is led through a very well-appointed chamber, evidently unused, to a smaller but scarcely less carefully arranged apartment beyond. The first is so plainly a room *not* in daily use, that she turns involuntarily to her companion.

"Is this *your* room, Mrs. Connolly?"

"For the night, me dear," says that excellent woman mysteriously.

"You have changed your room to suit me. You mean something," says the girl,

growing crimson, and feeling as if her heart were going to burst. “ *What is it?* ”

“ No, no, miss ! No, indeed ! ” confusedly. “ But, Miss Joyce, I’ll say this, that ‘tis eight year now since Misther Monkton came here, an’ many’s the good turn he’s done me, since he’s been me lord’s agint. An’ that’s nothing at all, miss, to the gratitude I bear towards yer poor father, the ould head o’ the house. An’ d’ye think when occasion comes I wouldn’t stand up an’ do the best I could for one o’ yer blood ? Fegs, I’ll take care anyway, that ‘t won’t be in the power of anyone to say a word agin *you*. ”

“ Against *me*. ”

“ You’re young, miss. But there’s people ould enough to have sinse an’ charity as haven’t it. *I* can see ye couldn’t git home to-night through that rain, though I’m not sayin’, ” a little spitefully—“ but that *he* might have managed it. Still, faith, ’twas bad thravellin’ for man or baste, ” with a

view to softening down her real opinion of Beauclerk's behaviour. How can she condemn him safely? Is he not my lady's own brother? Is not my lord the owner of the very ground on which the inn is built, of the farm a mile away where her cows are chewing the cud by this time in peace and safety?

“ You have changed your room to oblige me,” says Joyce, still with that strange miserable look in her eyes.

“ Don’t think about that, Miss Joyce, now. An’ don’t fret yerself about anything else ayther; sure ye can remimber that I’m to yer back always.”

She bridles, and draws up her ample figure to its fullest height. Indeed, looking at her, it might suggest itself to any reasonable being, that even the forlornest damsel with any such noble support might well defy the world.

But Joyce is not to be so easily consoled. What is support to her. Who can

console a torn heart? The day has been *too* eventful! It has overcome her courage. Not only has she lost faith in her own power to face the angry authorities at home, she has lost faith too in one, to whom, against her better judgment, she had given more of her thoughts than was wise. The fact that she has recovered from that folly does not render the memory of the recovery less painful. The awakening from a troubled dream is always full of anguish.

Rising from a sleepless bed, she goes down next morning to find Mrs. Connolly standing on the lowest step of the stairs as if awaiting her, booted and spurred for the journey.

"I tould him to ordher the thrap early, me dear, for I knew ye'd be anxious," says the kind woman squeezing her hand. "An' now," with an anxious glance at her, "I hope ye ate yer breakfast. I guessed ye'd like it in yer room, so I sint it up to ye. Well—come on, dear. Mr. Beauclerk is out-

side waitin'. I explained it all to him. Said ye were tired, ye know, an' eager to git back. And so all's ready an' the horse impatient."

In spite of the storm of yesterday, that seemed to shake earth and Heaven, to-day is beautiful. Soft glistening steams are rising from every hill and bog and valley, as the hot sun's rays beat upon them. The world seems wrapped in one vast vapourous mist most lovely to behold. All the woodland flowers are holding up their heads again, after their past smiting from the cruel rain, the trees are swaying to and fro in the fresh morning breeze, thousands of glittering drops brightening the air, as they swing themselves from side to side. All things speak of a new birth, a resurrection, a joyful waking from a terrifying past. The grass looks greener for its bath, all dust is laid quite low, the very lichens on the walls as they drive past them look washed and glorified.

The sun is flooding the sky with gorgeous light ; there are “ sweete smels al arownd.” The birds in the woods on either side of the roadway are singing high carols in praise of this glorious day. All nature seems joyous. Joyce alone is silent, unappreciative, unhappy.

The nearer she gets to the Court, the more perturbed she grows in mind. How will they receive her there ? Barbara had said that Lady Baltimore would not be likely to encourage an attachment between her and Beauclerk, and now, though the attachment is impossible, what will she think of this unfortunate adventure. She is so depressed that speech seems impossible to her, and to all Mr. Beauclerk’s sallies she scarcely returns an answer.

His sallies are many. Never has he appeared in gayer spirits. The fact that the girl beside him is in unmistakably low spirits has either escaped him or he has decided on taking no notice of it. Last

night, over that final cigar, he had made up his mind that it would be wise to say to her some little thing that would unmistakably awaken her to the fact, that there was nothing between him and her of any *serious* importance. Now, having covered half the distance that lies between them and the Court, he feels will be a good time to say that *little thing*. She is too *distracte* to please him. She is evidently brooding over something. If she thinks—— Better crush all such hopes at once.

“I wonder what they are thinking about us at home?” he says presently, with quite a cheerful laugh, suggestive of amusement.

No answer.

“I daresay,” with a second edition of the laugh, full now of a wider amusement, as though the comical fancy that has caught hold of him has grown to completion, “I shouldn’t *wonder*, indeed, if they were thinking we had eloped.” This graceful speech he makes with the easiest air in the world.

"They may be thinking *you* have eloped, certainly," says Miss Kavanagh calmly. "One's own people, as a rule, know one very thoroughly, and are quite alive to one's little failings; but that they should think it of *me* is quite out of the question."

"Well, after all, I daresay you are right. I don't suppose it lies in the possibilities. They could hardly think it of me either," says Beauclerk, with a careless yawn, so extraordinarily careless indeed as to be worthy of note. "I'm too poor to carry out an amusement of that kind."

"One *couldn't* be too poor for 'that kind of amusement,' surely. Romance and history have both taught us that it is only the impecunious ones of the earth who ever indulge in that folly."

"I am not so learned as you are, but—. Well, *I'm* an 'impecunious one,' in all conscience. *I* couldn't carry it out. I only wish," tenderly, "*I could.*"

"With whom?" icily. As she asks the

question, she turns deliberately, and looks him steadily in the eyes. Something in her regard disconcerts him, and compels him to think that the following up of the "little thing" is likely to prove difficult.

"How can you ask me?" demands he with an assumption of reproachful fondness that is rather overdone.

"I *do*, nevertheless."

"With *you* then—if I must put it in words," says he, lowering his tone to the softest whisper. It is an eminently lover-like whisper; it is a distinctly careful one too. It is quite impossible for Mrs. Connally, sitting behind, to hear it, however carefully she may be attending.

"It is well you cannot put your fortune to the touch," says Joyce quietly. "If you could, disappointment alone would await you."

"You mean——?" asks he, somewhat sharply.

"That were it possible for me to commit

such a vulgarity as to run away with any one, *you*, certainly, would not be that one. You are the very last man on earth I should choose for so mistaken an adventure. Let me also add," says she, turning upon him with flashing eyes, though still her voice is determinately low and calm, "that you forget yourself strangely when you talk in this fashion to me." The scorn and indignation in her charming face are so apparent that it is now impossible to ignore them. Being thus compelled to acknowledge it, he grows angry. Beauclerk angry, is not nice.

"To do myself justice, I seldom do *that*!" says he, with a rather nasty laugh. "To forget *myself* is not part of my calculations. I can generally remember No. 1."

"You will remember me too, if you please, so long as I am with you," says Joyce, with a grave and very gentle dignity ; but with a certain determination that makes itself felt. Beauclerk, though conscious of being some-

what cowed, is bully enough to make one more thrust.

"After all, Dysart was right," says he. "He prophesied there would be rain. He advised you not to undertake our ill-starred journey of—*yesterday*." There is distinct and very malicious meaning in the emphasis he throws into the last word.

"I begin to think Mr. Dysart is always right," says Joyce, bravely, though her heart has begun to beat furiously. That terrible fear of what they will say to her when she gets back—of their anger—their *courteous* anger—their condemnation—has been suddenly presented to her again, and her courage dies within her. Dysart, what will *he* say? It strikes even herself as strange that his view of her conduct is the one that most disturbs her.

"Only *beginning* to think it? Why, I always understood Dysart was immaculate. The 'couldn't err' sort of person one reads of but never sees. You have been slow,

surely, to gauge his merits. I confess *I* have been even slower. I haven't gauged them yet. But then—Dysart and I were never much in sympathy with each other."

"No. One can understand that," says she, slowly.

"One can, naturally," with the utmost self-complacence. "I confess, indeed," with a sudden slight burst of vindictiveness, "that I never liked Dysart; idiotic sort of fool in my estimation, self-opinionated like all fools, and deucedly impertinent in that silent way of his. I believe," with a contemptuous laugh, "he has given it as his opinion that there is very little to like in me either."

"Has he? We were saying just now he is always right," says Miss Kavanagh, absently, and in a tone so low that Beauclerk may be excused for scarcely believing his ears.

"Eh?" says he; but there is no answer, and presently both fall into a silent mood; Joyce, because conversation is terrible to her

just at present, and he, because anger is consuming him.

He had kept up a lively converse all through the earlier part of their drive, ignoring the depression that only too plainly was crushing upon his companion, with a view to putting an end to sentimentality of any sort. *Her* discomfort, *her* unhappiness were as nothing to him ; he thought only of himself. Few men, under the circumstances, would have so acted, for most men, in spite of all the old maids who so generously abuse them, are chivalrous, and have kindly hearts ; and indeed it is only a melancholy specimen here and there who will fail to feel pity for a woman in distress. Beauclerk is a “melancholy specimen.”

CHAPTER VII.

“ Man, false man, smiling, destructive man.”

“ Who breathes must suffer, and who thinks must mourn ;
And he alone is bless'd who ne'er was born.”

“ OH ! my dear girl, is it you at last,” cries Lady Baltimore, running out into the hall, as Joyce enters it. “ We have been so frightened ! Such a storm, and Baltimore says that mare you had is very uncertain. *Where* did you get shelter ? ”

The very warmth and kindness of her welcome, the utter absence of disapproval in it of any sort, so unnerves Joyce that she can make no reply ; can only cling to her kindly hostess, and hide her face on her shoulder.

“ Is that you, Mrs. Connolly ? ” says Lady Baltimore, smiling at mine hostess of the *Baltimore Arms*, over the girl’s shoulder.

"Yes, my lady," with a curtsey so low that one wonders how she ever comes up again. "I made so bould, my lady, as to bring ye home Miss Joyce, myself. I know Misther Beauclerk to be a good support in himself, but I thought it would be a reasonable sort of a thing to give her the company of one of her own women folk besides."

"Quite right. *Quite*," says Lady Baltimore.

"Oh ! she has been so *kind* to me," says Joyce, raising now a pale face to turn a glance of gratitude on Mrs. Connolly.

"Why, indeed, my lady, I wish I might ha' bin able to do more for her ; an' I'm sorry to say I'd to put her up in a small, most inconvenient room, just inside o' me own."

"How was that ?" asks Lady Baltimore, kindly. "The Inn so full, then ?"

"Fegs, 'twas that was the matther wid it," says Mrs. Connolly, with a beaming smile. "Crammed from cellar to garret."

"Ah! the wet night, I suppose!"

"Just so, my lady," composedly, and with another deep curtsey.

Lady Baltimore having given Mrs. Connolly into the care of the housekeeper, who is an old friend of hers, leads Joyce upstairs.

"You are not angry with me?" says Joyce, turning on the threshold of her room.

"With *you*, my dear child? No, indeed. With Norman, *very!* He should have turned back the moment he saw the first symptom of a storm. A short wetting would have done neither of you any harm."

"There was no warning, the storm was on us almost immediately, and we were then very close to Falling."

"Then, having placed you once safely in Mrs. Connolly's care, he should have returned here himself, at all hazards."

"It rained very hard," says Joyce in a cold, clear tone. Her eyes are on the ground. She is compelling herself to be strictly just to Beauclerk, but the effort is too much for

her. She fails to do it naturally, and so gives a false impression to her listener. Lady Baltimore casts a quick glance at her.

"Rain, what is rain?" says she.

"There was storm too, a violent storm; you must have felt it here."

"No storm should have prevented his return. He should have thought only of *you*."

A little bitter smile curls the girl's lips: it seems a farce to suggest that he should have thought of her. *He!* Now, with her eyes effectually opened, a certain scorn of herself in that he should have been able so easily to close them, takes possession of her. Is his sister blind still to his defects, that she expects so much from him; has she not read him rightly yet? Has she yet to learn that he will never consider *anyone*, where his own interests, comforts, position, clash with theirs?

"You look distressed, tired. I believe you are fretting about this," says Lady Baltimore with a little kindly bantering laugh. "Don't

be a silly child. Nobody has said or thought anything that has not been kindly of you. Did you sleep last night? No. I can see you didn't. There, lie down, and get a little rest before luncheon. I shall send you up a glass of champagne and a biscuit; don't refuse it."

She pulls down the blinds, and goes softly out of the room to her boudoir, where she finds Beauclerk awaiting her.

He is lounging comfortably on a satin fauteuil, looking the very *beau ideal* of pleasant, careless life. He makes his sister a present of one of his most beaming smiles as she enters.

"Ah! good morning, Isabel. I am afraid we gave you rather a fright, but you see it couldn't be helped. *What* an evening and night it turned out! By Jove! I thought the waterworks above were turned on for good at last, and for ever. We felt like the babes in the wood, abandoned, lost. Poor dear Miss Kavanagh. I felt so sorry for her.

You have seen her, I hope," his face has now taken the correct lines of decorous concern, "she is not over fatigued?"

"She looks tired! *depressed!*" says Lady Baltimore, regarding him seriously. "I wish, Norman, you had come home last evening."

"What! and bring Miss Kavanagh through all that storm!"

"No, you could have left her at Falling. I wish *you* had come home."

"Why?" with an amused laugh. "Are you afraid I have hopelessly compromised myself?"

"I was not thinking of you. I am more afraid," with a touch of cold displeasure, "of your having compromised Miss Kavanagh. There are such things as gossips in this curious world. You should have left Joyce in Mrs. Connolly's safe keeping, and come straight back here."

"To be laid up with rheumatism for the whole of the coming winter! Oh! most

unnatural sister, what is it you would have desired of me ? ”

“ You showed her great attention all this summer,” says Lady Baltimore, as if thinking.

“ I hope I showed a proper attention to all your guests.”

“ You were very specially attentive to her.”

“ To Miss Kavanagh, do you mean ? ” with a puzzled air. “ Ah ! well, yes. Perhaps I *did* give more of my time to her and to Miss Maliphant than to the others.”

“ Ah ! Miss Maliphant ! one can understand *that*,” says his sister with an intonation that is not entirely complimentary.

“ Can one ? *Here* is one who can’t, at all events. I confess I tried very hard to bring myself to the point there, but I failed. Nature was too strong for me. Good girl, you know, but—er—awful ! ”

“ We are not discussing Miss Maliphant, we were talking of Joyce,” icily.

“ Ah true ! ” as if just awakening to a

delightful fact. "And a far more charming subject for discussion, it must be allowed. Well, and what of Joyce—you *call* her Joyce?"

"Be human, Norman!" says Lady Baltimore with a sudden suspicion of fire in her tone. "Forget to *pose* once in a way. And this time it is important. Let me hear the truth from you. She seems unhappy, uncertain, nervous. I *like* her. There is something real, genuine about her. I would gladly think, that—— Do you know," she leans eagerly towards him. "I have sometimes thought you were in love with her."

"Have you? Do you know so have I," with a frankness very admirable. "She is one of the most agreeable girls of my acquaintance. There is something very special about her. I'm not surprised that both you and I fell into a conclusion of that sort."

"Am I to understand by that——?"

"Just the one thing. That I am too poor to marry."

"With that knowledge in your mind, you should not have acted towards her as you did yesterday. It was a mistake, believe me. You should have come home alone, or else brought her back as your promised wife."

"Ah! what a delightful vista you open up before me, but what an unkind one too," says Mr. Beauclerk, with a little reproachful uplifting of his hands and brows. "Have you no bowels of compassion? You know how the charms of domestic life have always attracted me. And to be able to enjoy them with such an admirable companion as Miss Kavanagh! Are you soulless, utterly without mercy, Isabel, that you open up to me a glorious vision such as that merely to taunt and disappoint me?"

"I am neither Joyce nor Miss Maliphant," says Lady Baltimore, with ill-suppressed contempt. "I wish you would try to remember that, Norman, it would spare time and trouble. You speak of Joyce as if she were the woman you love, and yet—would you subject the

woman you love to unkind comment? If you cared for Joyce, you would not have treated her as——”

“Ah, if I *did* care for her,” interrupts he.

“Well, *don't* you?” sternly. She has risen, and is looking down at him from the full height of her tall, slender figure, that now looks taller than usual.

“Oh, immensely!” declares Mr. Beauclerk airily. “My dear girl, you can't have studied me, not to know *that*; as I have just told you I think her charming. Quite out of the common—quite.”

“That will do,” shortly.

“You condemn me,” says he, in an aggrieved tone that has got something of amused surprise in it. “Yet you know—you of all others—how poor a devil I am! So poor, that I do not permit even the idea of marriage to enter my head.”

“Perhaps, however, you have permitted it to enter into hers!” says Lady Baltimore.

"Oh, my *dear* Isabel!" with a light laugh and a protesting glance. "Do you think she would thank you for that suggestion?"

"You should think. You should *think*," says Lady Baltimore, with some agitation. "She is a very young girl. She has lived entirely in the country. She knows nothing—nothing," throwing out her hand. "She is not awake to all the intriguing, lying, *falsity*," with a rush of bitter disgust, "that belongs to the bigger world beyond—the terrible world outside her own quiet one here."

"She *is* quiet here, isn't she?" says Beauclerk, with admirable appreciation. "Pity to take her out of it. Eh? And yet, so far as I can see, that is the cruel task you would impose on me."

"*Norman*," says his sister, turning suddenly and for the first time directly towards him.

"Well, my dear. What?" throwing one

leg negligently over the other. “It really comes to this, doesn’t it? That you want me to marry a certain somebody, and that *I* think I cannot afford to marry her. Then it lies in the proverbial nutshell.”

“The man who cannot afford to marry, should not afford himself the pleasures of flirtations,” says Lady Baltimore, with withering decision.

“No? Is that your final opinion. Good Heavens! Isabel, what a brow! What a terrible glance! If,” smiling, “you favour Baltimore with this style of thing whenever you disapprove of his smallest action, I don’t wonder he jibs so often at the matrimonial collar. You advised *me* to think just now; think *yourself*, my good Isabel, now and then, and probably you will find life easier.”

He is still smiling delightfully. He flings out this cruel gibe indeed, in the most careless manner possible.

“Ah! forget me,” says she, in a manner as careless as his own. If she has quivered

beneath that thrust of his, at all events she has had strength enough to suppress all signs of it. "Think—not of *her*—I daresay she will outlive it—but of *yourself*."

"What would you have me do, then?" demands he, rising here and confronting her. There is a good deal of venom in his handsome face, but Lady Baltimore braves it.

"I would have you act as an honourable man," says she, in a clear, if icy tone.

"You go pretty far, Isabel, very far, even for a sister," says he presently, his face, now, white with rage. "A moment ago I gave you some sound advice. I give you more now. Attend to your own affairs—which, by all accounts require a good deal of looking after—and *let mine alone*."

He is evidently furious. His sister makes a little gesture towards the door.

"Your taking it like this does not mend matters," she says calmly, "it only makes them, if possible, worse. Leave me!"

CHAPTER VIII.

“ AT SIXES AND SEVENS.”

Pol. : “ What do you read, my lord ? ”

Ham. : “ Words, words, words.”

SHE sighs heavily, as the door closes on her brother. A sense of weakness, of powerlessness oppresses her. She has fought *so* long, and for what ? Is there nothing to be gained ; no truth to be defended anywhere, no standard of right and wrong. Are *all* men—*all*—base, selfish, cowardly, dishonourable ? Her whole being seems aflame with the indignation that is consuming her, when a knock sounds at the door. There is only one person in the house who knocks at her boudoir door. To everyone, servants, guests, child, it is a free land ; to her husband alone, it is forbidden ground.

"Come in," says she, in a cold, reluctant tone.

"I know I shall be terribly in your way," says Baltimore, entering, "but I must beg you to give me five minutes. I hear Beauclerk has returned, and that you have seen him. What kept him?"

Now Lady Baltimore—who, a moment ago had condemned her brother heartily to his face—feels, as her husband addresses her, a perverse desire to openly contradict all that her honest judgment had led her to say to Beauclerk. That sense of indignation that was burning so hotly in her breast as Baltimore knocked at her door, still stirs within her, but now its fire is directed against this latest comer. Who is he, that he should *dare* to question the honour of any man; and that there are annoyance and condemnation now in Baltimore's eyes is not to be denied.

"The weather," returns she shortly.

"By your tone, I judge you deem that an

adequate excuse for keeping Miss Kavanagh from her home for half a day and a night."

"There was a terrible storm," says Lady Baltimore, calmly, "the worst we have had for months."

"If it had been ten times as bad, he should—in my opinion—have come home."

The words seem a mere repetition to Lady Baltimore. She had, indeed, used them to Beauclerk, herself—or some such—a few minutes ago. Yet she seems to repudiate all sympathy with them now.

"On such a night as that? I hardly see why. Joyce was with an old friend. Mrs. Connolly was once a servant of her father's, and he——"

"Should have left her with the old friend and come home."

Again her own argument, and again perversity drives her to take the opposite side—the side against her conscience.

"Society must be in a very bad state, if a man must force encounter thunder, rain,

lightning—in fact, a chance of death from cold and exposure, all because he dare not spend one night beneath the roof of a respectable woman like Mrs. Connolly, with a girl-friend, without bringing down on him the censures of his entire world."

" You can, it appears, be a most eloquent advocate for the supposed follies of anyone but your husband. Nevertheless, I must persist in my own opinion that it was, to put it very charitably indeed, inconsiderate of your brother to study his own comfort at the expense of his—girl friend. I believe that is your way of putting it, isn't it ?"

" Yes," immovably. She has so far given way to movement however, that she has taken up a feather fan lying near, and now so holds it between her and Baltimore that he cannot distinctly see her face.

" As for the world you speak of—it will not judge him as leniently as you do. It can talk. No one," bitterly, " is as good a witness of that as I am."

"But seldom," coldly, "without reason."

"And no one is a better witness of that than *you* are ! That is what you would say, isn't it ? Put down that fan, can't you ?" with a touch of savage impatience. "Are you ashamed to carry out your argument with me face to face ?"

"*Ashamed !*" Lady Baltimore has sprung suddenly to her feet, and sent the fan with a little crash to the ground. "Oh ! shame of *you* to mention such a word."

"Am I to be for ever your one scape-goat ? Now take another one, I beseech you," says Baltimore with that old, queer, devilish mockery on his face that was never seen there until gossiping tongues divided him from his wife. "Here is your brother, actually thrown to you, as it were. Surely he will be a proof that I am not the only vile one amongst all the herd. If nothing else, acknowledge him *selfish*. A man who thought more of a dry coat than a young—a very young—girl's reputation. Is that

nothing ? Oh ! consider, I beseech you ! ” his bantering manner, in which there is so much misery that it should have reached her but does not—grows stronger every instant. “ Even a big chill from the heavens above would not have killed *him*, whereas we all know how a *little breath* from the world below can kill many a——”

“ Oh ! you can talk, talk, *talk*,” says she, that late unusual burst of passion showing some hot embers still. “ But can words alter facts ? ” She pauses ; a sudden chill seems to enwrap her. As if horrified by her late descent into passion she gathers herself together, and defies him once again with a cold look. “ Why say anything more about it ? ” she says. “ We do not agree.”

“ On this subject, at least, we should,” says he hotly. “ I think your brother should not have left us in ignorance of Miss Kavanagh’s safety for so many hours. And you,” with a sneer, “ who are such a martinet for propriety, should certainly be prepared

to acknowledge that he should not have so regulated his conduct as to make her a subject for unkind comment to the county. Badly," looking at her deliberately, "as you think of me, I should not have done it."

"No?" says she. It is a cruel—an unmistakably *insulting* monosyllable. And, bearing no other word with it—is the more detestable to the hearer.

"No," says he loudly. "Sneer as you will—my conscience is at rest there, so I can defy your suspicions."

"Ah! *there!*" says she.

"My dear creature," says he, "we all know there is but one villain in the world, and you are the proud possessor of him—as a husband. Permit me to observe however, that a man of *your* code of honour, and of *mine* for the matter of that—but I forget that honour and I have no cousinship in your estimation—would have chosen to be wet to the skin rather than imperil the fair name of the girl he loved."

"Has he told you he loved her?"

"Not in so many words."

"Then from what do you argue?"

"My dear, I have told you that you are too much for me in argument! I, a simple onlooker, have judged merely from an every-day observance of little unobtrusive facts. If your brother is not in love with Miss Kavanagh I think he ought to be. I speak ignorantly I allow. I am not, like you, a deep student of human nature. If too, he did not feel it his duty to bring her home last night, or else, to leave her at Falling and return here himself—I fail to sympathise with him. I should not so have failed her."

"Oh! but you!" says his wife, with a little contemptuous smile. "You who are such a paragon of virtue. It would not be expected of *you* that you should make such a mistake!"

She has sent forth her dart impulsively, sharply, out of the overflowing fulness of her angry heart—and when too late, when it has

sped past recall — perhaps repents the speeding !

Such repentances, when felt too late, bring vices in their train ; the desire for good, when chilled, turns to evil. The mind, never idle, if debarred from the best, leans inevitably towards the worst. Angry with herself, her very soul embittered within her, Lady Baltimore feels more and more a sense of passionate wrong against the man who had wooed and won her, and sown the seeds of gnawing distrust within her bosom.

Baltimore's face has whitened. His brow contracts.

“ What a devilish unforgiving thing is a good woman,” says he with a reckless laugh. “ That’s a compliment, my lady—take it as you will. What ! are your sneers to outlast life itself. Is that old supposed sin of mine *never* to be condoned ? Why—say it was a real thing, instead of being the myth it is. Even so—a woman all prayers, all holiness, such as you are, might manage to pardon it ! ”

Lady Baltimore, rising, walks deliberately towards the door. It is her usual method of putting an end to all discussions of this sort between them—of terminating any allusions to what she believes to be his unfaithful past—that past that has wrecked her life.

As a rule Baltimore makes no attempt to prolong the argument. He has always let her go, with a sneering word perhaps, or a muttered exclamation—but to-day he follows her, and stepping between her and the door, bars her departure.

“ By heavens ! you *shall* hear me,” says he, his face dark with anger. “ I will not submit any longer, in silence, to your insolent treatment of me. You condemn *me*, but I tell you it is *I* who should condemn. Do you think I believe in your present attitude towards me. Pretend as you will, even to yourself—in your soul it is impossible that you should give credence to that old story ; false as it is old. No ! you cling to it to mask the fact that you have tired of me.”

“ Let me pass.”

“ Not until you have heard me ! ” With a light, but determined grasp of her arm, he presses her back into the chair she has just quitted.

“ That story was a lie I tell you. *Before* our marriage, I confess, there were some things—not creditable—to which I plead guilty, but——”

“ Oh ! be silent ! ” cries she, putting up her hand impulsively to check him. There are open disgust and horror on her pale, severe face.

“ Before, *before* our marriage,” persists he passionately. “ What ! do you think there is no temptation—no sin—no falling away from the stern path of virtue in this life ? Are you so mad or so ignorant as to believe that every man you meet could show a perfectly clean record of——”

“ I cannot—I *will* not listen,” interposes she, springing to her feet, white and indignant.

"There is nothing to hear. I am not going to pollute your ears," says he, with a curl of his lip. "Pray be reassured. What I only wish to say is, that if you condemn me for a few past sins, you should condemn also half your acquaintances. That, however, you do not do. For me alone, for your husband, you reserve all your resentment."

"What are the others to me?"

"What am *I* to you, for the matter of that?" with a bitter laugh, "if they are nothing, I am *less* than nothing. You deliberately flung me aside, all because——Why, look here!" moving towards her in uncontrollable agitation, "say I *had* sinned above the Galileans—say that lie was true—say I had out-Heroded Herod in evil courses, still am I past the pale of forgiveness? Saint as you are, have you no pity for me? In all your histories of love and peace and perfection is there never a case of a poor devil of a sinner like me being taken back into grace—absolved—pardoned?"

"To rave like this is useless. There is no good to be got from it. You know what I think, what I believe. You deceived—wronged—— Let me go, Cecil!"

"Before—*before*," repeats he, obstinately. "What that woman told you since, I *swear* to you was a most damned lie."

"I refuse to go into it again."

She is deadly pale now. Her bloodless lips almost refuse to let the words go through them.

"You mean by that, that in spite of my oath you still cling to your belief that I am lying to you?"

His face is livid. There is something almost dangerous about it, but Lady Baltimore has come of too old and good a race to be frightened into submission. Raising one small, slender hand, she lays it upon his breast, and with a little haughty upturning of her shapely head, pushes him from her.

"I have told you I refuse to go into it,"

says she, with superb self-control. "How long do you intend to keep me here? When may I be allowed to leave the room?"

There is distinct defiance in the clear glance she casts at him.

Baltimore draws a long breath, and then bursts into a strange laugh.

"Why, when you will," says he, shrugging his shoulders. He makes a graceful motion of his hand towards the door. "Shall I open it for you? But a word still let me say—if you are not in *too* great a hurry! Christianity, my fair saint, so far as ever I could hear or read, has been made up of mercy. Now you are merciless! Would you mind letting me know how you reconcile one—"

"You perversely mistake me—I am no saint. I do not"—coldly—"profess to be one. I am no such earnest seeker after righteousness as you maliciously represent me. All I desire is honesty of purpose, and a decent sense of honour—honour that *makes* decency. That is all. For the rest I am

only a poor woman who loved once, and was—*how* many times deceived?—*that* probably I shall never know."

Her sad, *sad* eyes, looking at him, grow suddenly full of tears.

"Isabel! My meeting with that woman—that time"—vehemently—"in Town was accidental! I—— It was the merest chance——"

"*Don't!*" says she, raising her hand, and with such a painful repression of her voice as to render it almost a whisper. "I have told you it is useless. I have heard too much to believe anything now. I shall never, I think," very sadly, "believe in any one again. You have murdered faith in me. Tell this tale of yours to someone else—someone *willing* to believe—to"—with a terrible touch of scorn—"Lady Swansdown, for example."

"Why do you bring her into the discussion?" asks he, turning quickly to her. Has she heard anything? That scene in the

garden that now seems to fill him with self-contempt. What a *bêtise* it was ! And what did it amount to ? Nothing ! Lady Swansdown, he is honestly convinced, cares as little for him as he for her. And at this moment it is borne in upon him that he would give the embraces of a thousand such as she, for one kind glance from the woman before him.

“ I merely mentioned her as a possible person who might listen to you,” with a slight lifting of her shoulders. “ A mere idle suggestion. You will pardon my saying that this has been an idle discussion altogether. You began by denouncing my brother to me, and now——”

“ You have ended by denouncing your husband to *me* ! As idle a beginning as an end surely. Still, to go back to Beauclerk. I persist in saying he has behaved scandalously in this affair. He has imperilled that poor child’s good name.”

“ *You* can imperil names, too ! ” says she, turning almost fiercely on him.

“Lady Swansdown again, I suppose,” says he, with a bored uplifting of his brows. “The old grievance is not sufficient, then ; you must have a new one. I am afraid I must disappoint you. Lady Swansdown, I assure you, cares nothing at all for me, and I care just the same amount for her.”

“Since when ?”

“Since the world began—if you want a long date !”

“What a *liar* you are, Baltimore !” says his wife, turning to him with a sudden breaking out of the pent-up passion within her. Involuntarily her hands clench themselves. She is pale no longer. A swift, hot flush has dyed her cheeks. Like an outraged, insulted queen she holds him a moment with her eyes, then sweeps out of the room.



CHAPTER IX.

“ Since thou art not as these are, go thy ways;
Thou hast no part in all my nights and days.
Lie still—sleep on—be glad. As such things be
Thou couldst not watch with me.”

LUNCHEON has gone off very pleasantly. Joyce, persuaded by Lady Baltimore, had gone down to it, feeling a little shy, and conscious of a growing headache. But everybody had been charming to her, and Baltimore, in especial, had been very careful in his manner of treating her, saying little nice things to her, and insisting on her sitting next to him, a seat hitherto Lady Swansdown's own.

The latter had taken this so perfectly, that one might be pardoned for thinking it had been arranged beforehand between her and her host. At all events Lady Swansdown was very sympathetic, and indeed everybody

seemed bent on treating her as a heroine of the highest order.

Joyce herself felt dull—nerveless. Words did not seem to come easily to her. She was tired, she thought, and of course she *was*, having spent a sleepless night. One little matter gave her cause for thankfulness. Dysart was absent from luncheon. He had gone on a long walking expedition, Lady Baltimore said, that would prevent his returning home until dinner-hour—until quite eight o'clock. Joyce told herself she was glad of this—though *why* she did *not* tell herself. At all events the news left her very silent.

But her silence was not noticed. It could not be, indeed, so great and so animated was the flow of Beauclerk's eloquence. Without addressing anybody in particular, he seemed to address everybody. He kept the whole table alive. He treated yesterday's adventure as a tremendously amusing affair, and invited everyone to look upon it as he did. He insisted on describing Miss Kavanagh and him-

self in the same light as he had described them earlier to his sister, as the modern Babes in the Wood, Mrs. Connolly being the Robin. He made several of the people who had dropped in to luncheon roar with laughter over his description of that excellent inn-keeper. Her sayings—her appearance—her stern notions of morality that induced her to bring them home “personally conducted”—the size of her waist—and her heart—and many other things. He was extremely funny. The fact that his sister smiled only when she felt she *must* to avoid comment, and that his host refused to smile at all, and that Miss Kavanagh was evidently on thorns all the time, did not for an instant damp his overflowing spirits.

* * * *

It is now seven o'clock; Miss Kavanagh, on her way upstairs to dress for dinner, suddenly remembering that there is a book in the library, left by her early in the after-

noon on the central table, turns aside to fetch it.

She forgets however what she has come for, when, having entered the room, she sees Dysart standing before the fire, staring apparently at nothing. To her chagrin, she is conscious that the unmistakable start she had made on seeing him, is known to him.

“I didn’t know you had returned,” says she awkwardly, yet making a courageous effort to appear as natural as usual.

“No? I knew *you* had returned,” says he slowly.

“It is very late to say good-morning,” says she with a poor little attempt at a laugh, but still advancing towards him and holding out her hand.

“*Too late!*” replies he, ignoring the hand. Joyce, as if struck by some cruel blow, draws back a step or two.

“You are not tired, I hope?” asks Dysart courteously.

“Oh no.” She feels stifled; choked. A

desire to get to the door, and escape—lose sight of him for ever—is the one strong longing that possesses her ; but to move requires strength, and she feels that her limbs are trembling beneath her.

“It was a long drive, however. And the storm was severe. I fear you must have suffered in some way.”

“I have not suffered,” says she, in a dull emotionless way. Indeed, she hardly knows what she says, a repetition of his own words seems the easiest thing to her, so she adopts it.

“No ?”

There is a considerable pause, and then——

“No ! It is true ! It is I only who have suffered,” says Dysart, with an uncontrollable abandonment to the misery that is destroying him. “I alone.”

“You mean something,” says Joyce. It is by a terrible effort that she speaks. She feels thoroughly unnerved—unstrung. Conscious that the nervous shaking of her hands will be-

tray her, she clasps them behind her tightly.
“ You meant something just now, when you refused to take my hand. But what ? What ? ”

“ You said it was too late,” replies he.
“ And I—agreed with you.”

“ That was not it ! ” says she feverishly.
“ There was more—much more ! Tell me,” passionately—“ what you meant. Why would you not touch me ? What am I to understand—— ? ”

“ That from henceforth you are free from the persecution of my love,” says Dysart deliberately. “ I was mad ever to hope that you could care for me—still, I *did* hope. That has been my undoing. But now—— ”

“ Well ? ” demands she faintly. Her whole being seems stunned. Something of all this she had anticipated, but the reality is far worse than any anticipation had been. She had seen him in her thoughts, angry, indignant, miserable, but that he should thus coldly set her aside—bid her an everlasting adieu—

be able to make up his mind deliberately to forget her—*this* had never occurred to her as being even probable.

“Now you are to understand that the idiotic farce played between us two the day before yesterday is at an end. The curtain is down. It is over. It was a failure—neither you, nor I, nor the public will ever hear of it again.”

“Is this—because I did not come home last evening in the rain and storm ?” Some small spark of courage has come back to her now, she lifts her head and looks at him.

“Oh ! be honest with me here, in our last hour together,” cries he vehemently. “You have cheated me all through—be true to yourself for once. Why pretend it is *my* fault that we part ? Yesterday I implored you not to go for that drive with him, and yet—you went. What was I—or my love for you in comparison with a few hours’ drive with that lying scoundrel ?”

"It was *only* the drive I thought of," says she piteously. "I—there was nothing else indeed. And *you*; if,"—raising her hand to her throat as if suffocating—"if you had not spoken so roughly—so——"

"Pshaw!" says Dysart, turning from her as if disgusted. To him, in his present furious mood, her grief, her fear, her shrinkings, are all so many movements in the game of coquette, at which she is a past mistress. "Will you think me a fool to the end?" says he. "See here," turning his angry eyes to hers. "I don't care *what* you say. I know you now. Too late indeed—but still I *know* you! To the very core of your heart you are one mass of deceit."

A little spasm crosses her face. She leans back heavily against the table behind her. "Oh, no, no," she says in a voice so low as to be almost unheard.

"You will deny, of course," says he mercilessly. "You would even have me believe that you regret the past—but you,

and such as you *never* regret. Man is your prey ! So many scalps to your belt is all you think about. Why," with an access of passion, "what am *I* to you ?—just the filling up of so many hours' amusement—no more ! Do you think all my eloquence would have any chance against *one* of his cursed words ? I might kneel at your feet from morning until night, and still I should be to you a thing of naught in comparison with him."

She holds out her hands to him in a little dumb fashion. Her tongue seems frozen. But he repulses this last attempt at reconciliation.

"It is no good. *None*! I have no belief in you left, so you can no longer cajole me. I know that I am nothing to you. *Nothing*! If," drawing a deep breath, "if a thousand years were to go by, I should still be nothing to you, if *he* were near. I give it up. The battle was too strong for me. I am defeated, lost, ruined."

"You have so arranged it," says she in a low tone, singularly clear. The violence

of his agitation has subdued hers, and rendered her comparatively calm.

" You must permit me to contradict you. The arrangement is all your own."

" Was it so great a crime to stay last night at Falling ? "

" There is no crime anywhere. That you should have made a decision between two men is not a crime."

" No ! I acknowledge I made the decision—but——"

" *When* did you make it ? "

" Last evening—and though you——"

" Oh ! no excuses," says he with a frown.
" Do you think I desire them ? "

He hesitates for a minute or so, and now turns to her abruptly. " Are you engaged to him finally ? "

" No."

" *No !*" In accents suggestive of surprise so intense as to almost enlarge into disbelief.

" You refused him then ? "

" No," says she again. Her heart seems to

die within her. Oh, the sense of shame that overpowers her. A sudden wild terrible hatred of Beauclerk takes her into possession. Why, why, had he not given her the chance of saying yes, instead of no, to that last searching question ?

“ You mean—that he——” He stops dead short as if not knowing how to proceed. Then, suddenly, his wrath breaks forth. “ And for that scoundrel, that fellow without a heart, you have sacrificed the best of you—your own heart ! For *him*, whose word is as light as his oath, you have flung behind you a love that would have surrounded you to your dying day. Good Heavens ! What are women made of ? But——” He sobers himself at once, as if smitten by some sharp remembrance, and, pale with shame and remorse, looks at her. “ Of course,” says he, “ it is only one heartbroken, as I am, who would have dared thus to address you. And it is plain to me, now, that there are reasons why he should *not* have spoken before this.

For one thing, you were alone with him, for another, you are tired, exhausted. No doubt, to-morrow, he——”

“ How *dare* you ? ” says she, in a voice that startles him—a very low voice, but vibrating with outraged pride. “ How *dare* you thus insult me ? You seem to think—to think—that because—last night—he and I were kept from our home by the storm——” She pauses ; that old, first odd sensation of choking now again oppresses her. She lays her hand upon the back of a chair near her, and presses heavily upon it. “ You think I have disgraced myself,” says she, the words coming in a little gasp from her parched lips. “ That is why you speak of things being at an end between us. Oh——”

“ You wrong me there,” says the young man, who has grown ghastly white. “ Whatever I may have said, I——”

“ You *meant* it ! ” says she. She draws herself up to the full height of her young, slender figure, and turning abruptly, moves

towards the door. As she reaches it, she looks back at him. " You are a coward ! " she says, in a slow, distinct tone, alive with scorn. " A *coward* ! "

CHAPTER X.

"I have seen the desire of mine eyes,
The beginning of love,
The season of kisses and sighs,
And the end thereof."

MISS KAVANAGH put in no appearance at dinner. "A chill," whispered Lady Baltimore to everybody, in her kindly, sympathetic way, caught during that miserable drive yesterday. She hoped it would be nothing, but thought it better to induce Joyce to remain quiet in her own room for the rest of the evening, safe from draughts and the dangers attendant on the baring of her neck and arms. She told her small story beautifully, but omitted to add that Joyce had refused to come down-stairs, and that she had seemed so wretchedly low-spirited that at last her hostess had ceased to urge her.

She had, however, spent a good deal of time

arguing with her on another subject—the girl's fixed determination to go home—"to go back to Barbara"—next day. Lady Baltimore had striven very diligently to turn her from this purpose, but all to no avail. She had even gone so far as to point out to Joyce that the fact of her thus leaving the Court before the expiration of her visit, might suggest itself to some people in a very unpleasant light. They might say she had come to the end of her welcome there—been given her *congé*, in fact—on account of that luckless adventure with her hostess' brother.

Joyce was deaf to all such open hints. She remained obstinately determined not to stay a moment longer there than could be helped. Was it because of Norman she was going? No; she shook her head with such a look of contemptuous indifference, that Lady Baltimore found it impossible to doubt her and felt her heart thereby lightened. Was it Felix?

Miss Kavanagh had evidently resented that question at first, but finally had broken into a

passionate fit of tears, and when Lady Baltimore placed her arms round her, had not repulsed her.

"But, dear Joyce, he, himself, is leaving to-morrow."

"Oh, let me go home. Do not ask **me** to stay. I am more unhappy than I can tell you," said the girl brokenly.

"**You** have had a quarrel with him?"

Joyce bowed her head in a little quick, impatient way.

"It is Felix then, Joyce; not Norman? Let me say I am glad—for *your* sake; though that is a hard thing for a sister to say of her brother. But Norman is selfish. It is his worst fault, perhaps, but a bad one. As for this little misunderstanding with Felix, it will not last. He loves you, dearest, most honestly. You will make up this tiny——"

"*Never!*" said Joyce, interrupting her and releasing herself from her embrace. Her young face looked hard and unforgiving, and Lady Baltimore, with a sigh, decided on say-

ing no more just then. So she went down-stairs, and told her little tale about Joyce's indisposition, and was believed by nobody. They all said they were sorry, as in duty bound, and perhaps they were, taking their own view of her absence ; but dinner went off extremely well, nevertheless, and was considered quite a success.

Dysart was present, and was, apparently, in **very high spirits** ; so high, indeed, that at odd moments his hostess, knowing a good deal, stared at him. He, who was usually so silent a member, to-night outshone even the versatile Beauclerk in the lightness and persistency of his conversation.

This sudden burst of animation lasted him throughout the evening, carrying him triumphantly across the hour-and-a-half of drawing-room small talk, and even lasting till the more careless hours in the smoking-room had come to an end, and one by one the men had yawned themselves off to bed.

Then it died. So entirely, so forlornly as

to prove it had been only a mere passing and enforced exhilaration after all. They were all gone ; there was no need now to keep up the miserable farce—to seek to prevent their coupling her name with his, and therefore discovering the secret of her sad seclusion.

As Dysart found himself almost the last man in the room, he too rose, reluctantly, as though unwilling to give himself up to the solitary musings that he knew lay before him; the self-upbraidings, the vague remorse, the terrible dread lest he had been too severe, that he knows will be his all through the silent darkness. For what have sleep and he to do with each other to-night ?

He bade his host good-night and, with a pretence of going upstairs, turned aside into the deserted library and, choosing a book, flung himself into a chair, determined, if possible, to read his brain into a state of coma.



Twelve o'clock has struck, slowly, painfully,

as if the old time-keeper is sleepy too, and is nodding over his work. And now, one—as slowly, truly, but with a startling brevity that prevents one's dwelling on its drowsy note. Dysart, with a tired groan flings down his book, and, rising to his feet, stretches his arms above his head in an utter abandonment to sleepless fatigue that is even more mental than bodily. *Once* the subject of that book had been of an entralling interest to him. To-night it bores him. He has found himself unequal to the solving of the abstruse arguments it contains. One thought seems to have dulled all others. He is leaving to-morrow ! He is leaving *her* to-morrow ! Oh ! surely it is more than that curt pronoun can contain. He is leaving, in a few short hours, his life, his hope, his one small chance of Heaven upon Earth. How *much* she had been to him, how strong his hoping even against hope had been, he never knew till now, when all is swept out of his path for ever.

The increasing stillness of the house seems

to weigh upon him, rendering even gloomier his melancholy thoughts. How intolerably quiet the night is, not even a breath of wind is playing in the trees outside. On such a night as this ghosts might walk, and demons work their will. There is something ghastly in this unnatural cessation of all sound, all movement.

“What a strange power,” says Emerson, “there is in silence.” An old idea, yet always new. Who is there who has not been affected by it—has not known that curious, senseless dread of spirits present from some unknown world that very young children often feel? “Fear came upon me and trembling, which made all my bones to shake,” says Job in one of his most dismal moments; and now to Dysart this strange unaccountable chill feeling comes. Insensibly; born of the hour and the silence only, and with no smallest dread of things intangible.

The small clock on the mantelpiece sends

forth a tiny chime, so delicate that in the broad daylight, with broader views in the listeners, it might have gone unheard. *Now* it strikes upon the motionless air as loudly as though it were the crack of Doom. Poor little clock ! struggling to be acknowledged for twelve long years of nights and days, now is your revenge—the fruition of all your small ambitious desires.

Dysart starts violently at the sound of it. It is of importance, this little clock. It has wakened him to real life again. He has taken a step towards the door and the bed, the very idea of which up to this has been treated by him with ignominy, when—a sound in the hall outside stays him.

An unmistakable step, but so light as to suggest the idea of burglars. Dysart's spirits rise. The melancholy of a moment since deserts him. He looks round for the poker — that national, universal mode of defence when our castles are invaded by the “masked man.”

He has not time, however, to reach it before the handle of the door is slowly turned—before the door is as slowly opened, and——

“ *What is this?* ”

For a second Dysart's heart seems to stop beating. He can only gaze spellbound at this figure, clad all in white, that walks deliberately into the room, and, seemingly directly towards him. It is Joyce ! *Joyce!*

CHAPTER XI.

“Sleep ; and if life was bitter to thee, pardon,
If sweet, give thanks ; thou hast no more to live ;
And to give thanks is good, and to forgive.”

Is she dead, or still living ? Dysart, calmed now indeed, gazes at her with a heart contracted. Great Heaven ! how like death she looks, and yet—he knows she is still in the flesh. How strangely her eyes gleam. A *dull* gleam and so passionless. Her brown hair—not altogether fallen down her back, but loosened from its hairpins, and hanging in a soft heavy knot behind her head—gives an additional pallor to her already too white face. The open eyes are looking straight before them, unseeing. Her step is slow, mechanical, unearthly. It is only indeed when she lays the candle she holds upon the edge of the table, the extreme edge, that he knows she is asleep, and walking

in a dreamland that to waking mortals is inaccessible.

Silently, and always with that methodical step, she moves towards the fireplace—and still a little further—until she stands on that eventful spot where he had given up all claim to her, and thrown her back upon herself. *There* is the very square on the carpet where she stood some hours ago. There she stands now. To her right is the chair upon which she had leaned in great bitterness of spirit, trying to evoke help and strength from the dead oak. Now—in her dreams, as if remembering that past scene, she puts out her hands a little vaguely, a little blindly, and, the chair not being where in her vision she believes it to be, she gropes vaguely for it in a troubled fashion, the little trembling hands moving nervously from side to side. It is a very sad sight, the sadder for the mournful change that crosses the face of the sleeping girl. The lips take a melancholy curve; the long

lashes droop over the sightless eyes, a long, sad sigh escapes her.

Dysart, his heart beating wildly, makes a movement towards her. Whether the sound of his impetuous footstep disturbs her dream, or whether the coming of her fingers in sudden contact with the edge of the table does it—who can tell—she starts and wakens.

At first she stands as if not understanding, and then, with a terrified expression in her now sentient eyes, looks hurriedly around her. Her eyes meet Dysart's.

"Don't be frightened," begins he quickly.

"How did I come here?" interrupts she, in a voice panic-stricken. "I was upstairs; I remember nothing. It was only a moment since that I—— Was I *asleep?*"

She gives a hasty furtive glance at the pretty loose white garment that enfolds her.

"I suppose so," says Dysart. "You must have had some disturbing dream, and it drove you down here. It is nothing. Many people walk in their sleep."

"But I, *never*. Oh ! what is it ?" says she, as if appealing to him to explain herself to herself. "Was," faintly flushing, "anyone *else* here ? Did anyone see me ?"

"No one. They are all in bed ; all asleep."

"And you ?" doubtfully.

"I couldn't sleep," returns he slowly, gazing fixedly at her.

"I must go," says she feverishly. She moves rapidly towards the door—her one thought seems to be to get back to her own room. She looks ill, unstrung, frightened. This new phase in her has alarmed her. What if, for the future, she cannot even depend upon herself?—cannot know where her mind will carry her, when deadly sleep has fallen upon her ? It is a hateful thought. And to bring her here. Where *he* was ! What power has he over her ? Oh ! the sense of relief in thinking that she will be at home to-morrow—safe with Barbara.

Her hand is on the door. She is going.

“Joyce,” says Dysart, suddenly, sharply. All his soul is in his voice. So keenly it rings, that involuntarily she turns to him. Great agony must make itself felt, and to Dysart, seeing her on the point of leaving him for ever, it seems as though his life is being torn from him. In truth she *is* his life, the entire happiness of it—if she goes through that door unforgiving, she will carry with her all that makes it bearable.

She is looking at him. Her eyes are brilliant with nervous excitement; her face pale. Her very lips have lost their colour.

“Yes?” says she interrogatively, impatiently.

“I am going away to-morrow—I shall not——”

“Yes, yes—I know. I am going too.”

“I shall not see you again?”

“I *hope* not—I *think* not.”

She makes another step forward. Opening the door with a little light touch, she places

one hand before the candle and peers timidly into the dark hall outside.

"Don't let that be your last word to me!" says the young man, passionately. "Joyce, hear me! There must be *some* excuse for me!"

"Excuse?" says she, looking back at him over her shoulder, her lovely face full of a curious wonder.

"Yes—yes! I was mad! I didn't mean a word I said—I swear it! I—— Joyce, *forgive me!*"

The words, though whispered, burst from him with a despairing vehemence. He would have caught her hand but that she lifts her eyes to his—*such* eyes!

There is a little pause, and then:

"Oh, no! Never—never!" says she.

Her tone is very low and clear—not angry, not even hasty or reproachful. Only very sad and *certain*. It kills all hope.

She goes quickly through the open doorway, closing it behind her. The faint,

ghostly sound of her footfalls can be heard as she crosses the hall. After a moment even this light sound ceases. She is indeed gone ! It is all over !

* * * * *

With a kind of desire to hide herself, Joyce has crept into her bed, sore at heart, angry, miserable. No hope that sleep will again visit her has led her to this step, and indeed, would sleep be desirable ? What a treacherous part it had played when last it fell on her !

How grieved he looked—how white ! He was evidently most honestly sorry for all the unkind things he had said to her. Not that he had said many, indeed, only—he had *looked* them. And she, she had been very hard—oh ! *too* hard. However, there was an end to it. To-morrow would place more miles between them, in every way, than would ever be recrossed. He would not come here again until he had forgotten her—

married, probably. They would not meet. There *should* have been comfort in that certainty, but alas ! when she sought for it, it eluded her—it was not there.

In spite of the trick Somnus had just played her, she would now gladly have courted him again, if only to escape from ever growing regret. But though she turns from side to side in a vain endeavour to secure him, that cruel god persistently denies her, and with mournful memories and tired eyes, she lies, watching, waiting for the tender breaking of the dawn upon the purple hills.

Slowly, slowly comes up the sun. Coldly, and with a tremulous lingering, the light shines on land and sea. Then sound the bursting chaunts of birds, the rush of streams, the gentle sighings of the winds through herb and foliage.

Joyce, thankful for the blessed daylight, flings the clothes aside, and with languid step, and eyes, sad always, but grown weary

too with sleeplessness and thoughts unkind,
moves lightly to the window.

Throwing wide the casement she lets the
cool morning air flow in.

A new day has arisen. What will it bring
her ? What *can* it bring, save disappoint-
ment only, and a vain regret ? Oh ! why
must she, of all people, be thus unblessed
upon this blessed morn ? Never has the sun
seemed brighter—the whole earth a greater
glow of glory.

“ Welcome the lord of light and lamp of day.
Welcome, fosterer of tender herbis green ;
Welcome, quickener of flourish'd flowers' sheen.

* * * * *

Welcome, depainter of the bloomit meads ;
Welcome, the life of everything that spreads ! ”

Yet to Joyce welcome to the rising sun
seems impossible. What is the good of day
when hope is dead ? In another hour or two
she must rise, go downstairs, talk, laugh, and
appear interested in all that is being said—
and with a heart at variance with joy—a poor
heart, heavy as lead.

A kind of despairing rage against her crooked fortune moves her. Why has she been thus unlucky? Why at first should a foolish, vagrant feeling have led her to think so strongly of one unworthy (and now hateful to her) as to prejudice her in the mind of the one really worthy. What madness possessed her? Surely she is the most unfortunate girl alive! A sense of injustice brings the tears into her eyes, and blots out the slowly widening landscape from her view.

“How happy some o'er other some can be !”

Her thoughts run to Barbara and Monkton. *They* are happy in spite of many frowns from fortune. They are poor—as Society counts poverty—but the want of money is not a cardinal evil. They love each other; and the children are things to be loved as well—*darling* children! well grown, and strong, and healthy, though terrible little Turks at times—God bless them! Oh! that *she* could count herself as blessed as Barbara, whose

greatest trouble is to deny herself this and that, to be able to pay for the other thing. No ! to be poor is *not* to be unhappy. "Our happiness in this world," says a writer, "depends on the affections we are able to inspire." Truly she—Joyce—has not been successful in *her* quest. For if he had loved her, would he ever have doubted her ? "Perfect love," says the oldest, grandest testimony of all, "casteth out fear." And *he* had feared. Sitting here in the dawning daylight, the tears ran softly down her cheeks.

It is a strange thing, but true, that never once during this whole night's dreary vigil, do her thoughts once turn to Beauclerk.

CHAPTER XII.

“O, there’s mony a leaf in Atholl wood,
And mony a bird in its breast,
And mony a pain may the heart sustain
Ere it sab itsel’ to rest.”

BARBARA meets her on the threshold, and draws her with loving arms into the dining-room.

“I knew you would be here at this hour. Lady Baltimore wrote me word about it. And I have sent the chicks away to play in the garden as I thought you would like to have a comfortable chat just at first.”

“Lady Baltimore wrote?”

“Yes, dear. Just to say you were distressed about that unfortunate affair—that drive, you know—and that you felt you wanted to come back to me. I was glad you wanted that, darling.”

“You are not angry with me, Barbara?”

asks the girl, loosening her sister's arms the better to see her face.

"Angry ! No, how could I be angry ?" says Mrs. Monkton, the more vehemently in that she knows she *had* been very angry just at first. "It was the merest chance. It might have happened to anybody. One can't control storms !"

"No—that's what Mrs. Connolly said, only she called it 'the ilimints,'" says Joyce, with quite a little ghost of a smile.

"Well, now you are home again, and it's all behind you. And there is really *nothing* in it. And you must not think so much about it," says Barbara, fondling her hand. "Lady Baltimore said you were *too* unhappy about it."

"Did she say that ? What else did she say ?" asks the girl, regarding her sister with searching eyes. What had Lady Baltimore told her ? That impulsive admission to the latter last night has been troubling Joyce ever since, and now, to have to lay bare her

heart again, to acknowledge her seeming fickleness, to receive Barbara's congratulation on it, only to declare that this second lover has, too, been placed by Fate outside her life, seems too bitter to her. Oh, no—she *cannot* tell Barbara.

"Why, nothing," says Mrs. Monkton, who is now busying herself removing the girl's hat and furs. "What was there to tell, after all?" She is plainly determined to treat the matter lightly.

"Oh, there is a good deal," says Joyce bitterly. "Why don't you tell me," turning suddenly upon her sister, "that you knew how it would be all along? That you distrusted that Mr. Beauclerk from the very first, and that Felix Dysart was always worth a thousand of him?" There is something that is almost defiant in her manner.

"Because, for one thing, I very seldom call him *Felix*," says Mrs. Monkton, with a smile, alluding to the last accusation. "And because, too, I can't bear the '*I told you so*'

persons. You mustn't class me with them, Joyce, whatever you do."

"I shan't be able to do much more, at all events," says Joyce presently. "That's one comfort, not only for myself, but to my family. I expect I have excelled myself *this* time. Well," with a dull little laugh, "it will have to *last*—so——"

"Joyce," says her sister quickly ; "tell me one small thing. Mr. Beauclerk—he——"

"Yes ?" stonily, as Barbara goes on a rock.

"You—you are not engaged to him ?"

Joyce breaks into an angry laugh.

"That is what you all ask," says she. "There is no variety ; *none*. No, no, no ; I am engaged to nobody. Nobody wants me, and I—— 'I care for nobody, not I ; *for* nobody cares for me.' Mark the heavy emphasis on the 'for,' I beg you, Barbara ! "

She breaks entirely from her sister's hold, and springs to her feet.

"You are tired," says Mrs. Monkton, anxiously, rising too.

"Why don't you say what you really mean?" says Joyce, turning almost fiercely to her. "Why pretend you think I am fatigued when you honestly think I am miserable because Mr. Beauclerk has not asked me to marry him. No! I don't care *what* you think. I *am* miserable! And though I were to tell you over and over again it was not because of *him*, you would not believe me, so I will say nothing."

"Here is Freddy," says Mrs. Monkton, nervously, who has just seen her husband's head pass the window. He enters the room almost as she speaks.

"Well, Joyce, back again," says he, affectionately. He kisses the girl warmly. "Horrid drive you must have had through that storm."

"You, *too*, blame the storm, then, and not me," says Joyce, with a smile. "Everybody doesn't take your view of it. It appears I should have returned in all that rain and wind and—"

"Pshaw ! Never listen to extremists," says Mr. Monkton, sinking lazily into a chair. "They will land you on all sorts of barren coasts if you give ear to them. For my part, I never could see why two people of opposite sexes if overcome by *Nature's* artillery, should not spend a night under a wayside inn without calling down upon them the *social* artillery of gossip. There is only one thing in the whole affair," says Mr. Monkton, seriously, "that has given me a moment's uneasiness."

"And that ?" says Joyce, nervously.

"Is how I can possibly be second to both of them. Dysart, I confess, has my sympathies, but if Beauclerk were to appear first upon the field and implore my assistance, I feel I should have a delicacy about refusing him."

"Freddy," says his wife, reprovingly.

"Oh, as for *that*," says Joyce, with a frown ; "I do think men are the most troublesome things on earth," she bursts out pre-

sently. "When one isn't loving them, one is hating them."

"How many of them at a time?" asks her brother-in-law, with deep interest. "Not more than two, Joyce, *please*. I couldn't grasp any more. My intellect is of a very limited order."

"So is mine, I think," says Joyce, with a tired little sigh. Monkton, although determined to treat the matter lightly, looks very sorry for her. Evidently she is out of joint with the whole world at present.

"How did Lady Baltimore take it?" asks he, with all the careless air of one asking a question on some unimportant subject.

"She was angry with Mr. Beauclerk for not leaving me at the inn, and coming home himself."

"Unsisterly woman!"

"She was quite right, after all," says Mrs. Monkton, who had defended Beauclerk herself, but cannot bear to hear another take his part.

"And, Dysart; how did *he* take it?" asks Monkton, smiling.

"I don't see why he should take it any way," says Joyce, coldly.

"Not even with soda-water?" says her brother-in-law. "Of course, it would be too much to expect him to take it *neat*. You broke it gently to him, I hope."

"Ah, you don't understand Mr. Dysart," says the girl, rising abruptly. "I did not understand him until yesterday."

"Is he so very abstruse?"

"He is very insolent," says Miss Kavanagh with a sudden touch of fire, that makes her sister look at her with some uneasiness.

"I see," says Mr. Monkton, slowly. He still, unfortunately, looks amused. "One never *does* know anybody until he or she gives way to a towering passion. So he gave you a right good scolding for being caught in the rain with Beauclerk. A little unreasonable, surely; but lovers never yet were

famous for their common sense. That little ingredient was forgotten in their composition. And so he gave you a lecture ? ”

“ Well, he is not likely to do it again,” says she slowly.

“ No ? Then it is more than likely that I shall be the one to be scolded presently. He won’t be able to content himself with silence. He will want to air his grievances, to revenge them on *some* one, and if you refuse to see him, *I* shall be that one. There is really only one small remark to be made about this whole matter,” says Mr. Monkton, with a rueful smile, “ and it remains for me to make it. If you *will* encourage two suitors at the same time, my good child, the least you may expect is trouble. You are bound to look out for ‘ breakers ahead,’ but (and this is the remark) it is very hard lines for a fourth and most innocent person, to have those suitors dropped straight on to him without a second’s notice. I’m not a born warrior ; the brunt of the battle is a sort of gaiety

that I confess myself unsuited for. I haven't been educated up to it. I——"

"There will be no battle," says Joyce, in a strange tone, "because there will be no combatants. For a battle there must be something to fight for, and here there is nothing. You are all wrong, Freddy. You will find that out after awhile. I have a headache, Barbara. I think," raising her lovely but pained eyes to her sister, "I should like to go into the garden for a little bit. The air there is always so sweet."

"Go, darling," says Barbara, whose own eyes have filled with tears. "Oh, Freddy," turning reproachfully to her husband as the door closes on Joyce, "how could you so have taken her? You *must* have seen how unhappy she was. And all about that *horrid* Beauclerk."

Monkton stares at her.

"So that is how *you* read it?" says he at last.

"There is no difficulty about the reading. Could it be in larger print?"

"Large enough, certainly, as to the unhappiness, but for 'Beauclerk,' I should advise the printer to insert Dysart."

"Dysart? *Felix*?"

"Unless, indeed, you could suggest a third."

"Nonsense!" says Mrs. Monkton, contemptuously. "She has never cared for poor Felix. How I wish she had. He is worth a thousand of that other; but girls are so perverse."

"They are. That is just my point," says her husband. "Joyce is so perverse that she won't allow herself to see that it is Dysart she prefers. However, there is one comfort, she is paying for her perversity."

"Freddy," says his wife, after a long pause, "do you really think that?"

"What? That girls are perverse?"

"No, no! That she likes Felix best?"

"That is indeed my fixed belief."

"Oh, Freddy!" cries his wife, throwing herself into his arms. "How *beautiful* of you. I've always *wanted* to think that, but never could until now—now that—"

"My clear judgment has been brought to bear upon it. Quite right, my dear, always regard your husband as a sort of demi-god, who—"

"Pouf!" says she. "Do you think I was born without a grain of sense. But really, Freddy— Oh! if it *might* be! Poor, *poor* darling! how sad she looked. If they have had a serious quarrel over her drive with that detestable Beauclerk—why—I—" Here she bursts into tears and with her face buried on Monkton's waistcoat, makes little wild dabs at the air with a right hand that is only to be appeased by having Monkton's handkerchief thrust into it.

"What a *baby* you are!" says he, giving her a loving little shake. "I declare you were well-named. The swift transitions from the tremendous 'Barbara' to the inconse-

quent ‘Baby’ takes but an instant, and exactly expresses you. A moment ago, you were bent on withering me ; now I am going to wither *you*.”

“ Oh, no ! don’t,” says she, half laughing, half crying. “ And besides, it is you who are inconsequent. You never keep to one point for a second.”

“ Why should I ?” says he ; “ when it is such a disagreeable one. There, let us give it up for the day. We can write ‘To be continued’ after it, and begin a fresh chapter to-morrow.”

* * * * *

Meantime, Joyce, making her way to the garden with a hope of finding there, at all events, silence, and opportunity for thought, seats herself upon a garden chair, and gives herself up a willing prey to melancholy. She had desired to struggle against this evil, but it had conquered her, and tears rising beneath her lids are falling on her

cheeks, when two small creatures emerging from the summer-house on her left catch sight of her.

They had been preparing for a rush, a real Redshank, painted and feathered, descent upon her, when something in her sorrowful attitude becomes known to them.

Fun dies within their kind little hearts. Their Joyce has come home to them—that is a matter for joy, but their Joyce has come home unhappy—that is a matter for grief. Step by step, hand in hand, they approach her, and even at the very last, with their little breasts overflowing with the delight of getting her back, it is with a very gentle precipitation that they throw themselves upon her.

And it never occurs to them either to trouble her for an explanation ; no probing questions issue from their lips. She is sorry, that is all. It is enough for their sympathies. *Too much.*

Joyce herself is hardly aware of the advent

of the little comforters, until two small arms steal round her neck and she finds Mabel's face pressed close against her own.

"Let me kiss her too," says Tommy, trying to push his sister away, and resenting openly the fact of her having secured the first attempt at consolation.

"You mustn't tease her, she's sorry. She's very sorry about something," says Mabel, turning up Joyce's face with her pink palm. "Aren't you, Joyce? There's droppies in your eyes."

"A little, darling," says Joyce brokenly.

"Then I'll be sorry *with* you," says the child, with all childhood's divine intuition, that to sorrow *alone* is to know a double sorrow. She hugs Joyce more closely with her tender arms, and Joyce, after a battle with her braver self, gives way, and breaks into bitter tears.

"There now! you've made her cry *right out!* You're a naughty girl," says Tommy to his sister, in a raging tone, meant to hide

the fact that he too, himself, is on the point of giving way ; in fact, another moment sees him dissolved in tears.

“Never mind, Joycie. Never mind. *We love you!*” sobs he, getting up on the back of the seat behind her, and making a very excellent attempt at strangulation.

“Do you ? There doesn’t seem to be any one else then but you !” says poor Joyce, pulling Mabel into her lap, and Tommy more to the front, and clasping them both to her with a little convulsive movement.

Perhaps the good cry she has on the top of those two loving little heads does her more good than anything else could possibly have done.

CHAPTER XIII.

“A bitter and perplexed ‘What shall I do?
Is worse to man than worse necessity.’”

THREE months have come and gone and winter is upon us. It is close on Christmas-tide indeed. All the trees lie bare and desolate, the leaves fallen from them, and their sweet denizens the birds, flown or dead.

Evening has fallen. The children are in the nursery, having a last romp before bed-hour. Their usual happy hunting-ground for that final fling is the drawing-room, but finding the atmosphere there, to-night, distinctly cloudy, they had beaten a simultaneous retreat to Bridget, and the battered old toys upstairs. Children, like rats, dislike discomfort.

Mrs. Monkton, sitting before the fire, that keeps up a continuous sound as musical as

the rippling of a small stream, is leaning back in her chair ; her pretty forehead puckered into a thousand doubts. Joyce, near her, is as silent as she is ; whilst Mr. Monkton, after a vain pretence at being absorbed in the morning paper (diligently digested at eleven this morning), flings it impatiently on the floor.

“ What’s the good of your looking like that, Barbara ? If you were *compelled* to accept this invitation from my mother, I could see some reason for your dismal glances, but when you know I am as far from wishing you to accept it, as you are yourself, why should——”

“ Ah ! but *are* you ? ” says his wife, with a swift, dissatisfied glance at him. The dissatisfaction is a good deal directed towards herself.

“ If you could make her sure of that,” says Joyce softly ; “ I have tried to explain it to her, but——”

“ I suppose I *am* unreasonable,” says

Barbara, rising, with a little laugh that has a good deal of grief in it. "I suppose I ought to believe," turning to her husband, "that you are dying for me to refuse this invitation from the people who have covered me with insult for eight years, when I know well that you are dying for me to accept it."

"Oh ! if you know that," says Monkton, rather feebly it must be confessed. This fatally late desire on the part of his people to become acquainted with his wife and children has taken hold of him ; has lived with him through the day, not for anything he personally could possibly gain by it, but because of a deep desire he has that they, his father and mother, should see and know his wife, and learn to admire and love her.

"Of course I know it," says Barbara almost fiercely. "Do you think I have lived with you all these years and cannot read your heart ? Don't think I blame you,

Freddy ! If the cases were reversed, I should feel just like you. I should go any lengths to be at one with my own people."

"I don't want to go to even the shortest length," says Mr. Monkton. As if a little nettled, he takes up the dull old local paper again, and begins a third severe examination of it. But Mrs. Monkton, feeling that she cannot survive another silence, lays her hand upon it and captures it.

"Let us talk about it, Freddy," says she.

"It will only make you more unhappy."

"Oh, no, I think not. It will do her good," says Joyce anxiously.

"Where is the letter ? I hardly saw it. *Who* is asked ?" demands Barbara feverishly.

"Nobody in particular, except you. My father has expressed a wish that we should occupy that house of his in Harley Street for the winter months, and my mother puts in, accidentally as it were, that she would like to see the children. But *you* are the one specially alluded to."

"They are too kind!" says Barbara rather unkindly herself.

"I quite see it in your light. It is an absolute impertinence," says Monkton with a suppressed sigh. "I allow all that. In fact I am with you, Barbara, all through; why keep thinking about it? Put it out of your head. It requires nothing more than a polite refusal."

"I shall hate to make it polite," says Barbara. And then, recurring to her first and sure knowledge of his secret desires, "you *want* to go to them?"

"I shall never go without you," returns he gravely.

"Ah! that is almost a challenge," says she, flushing.

"Barbara! perhaps he is right," says Joyce gently; as she speaks she gets up from the fire and makes her way to the door, and from that to her own room.

"*Will* you go without me?" says Bar-

bara, when she has gone, looking at her husband with large earnest eyes.

"Never. You say you know me thoroughly, Barbara ; why then ask that question ? "

"Well, you will never go then," says she, "for I—I will never enter those people's doors. I *couldn't*, Freddy. It would *kill* me !" She has kept up her defiant attitude so successfully, and for so long, that Mr. Monkton is now electrified when she suddenly bursts into tears and throws herself into his arms.

"You think me a beast !" says she, clinging to him.

"You are tired ; you are bothered. Give it up, darling," says he, patting her on the back, the most approved modern plan of reducing people to a state of common sense.

"But you do think it, don't you ? "

"No, Barbara. There now, be a good sensible girl, and try to realise that I don't want you to accept this invitation ; and

that I am going to write to my mother in the morning to say it is impossible for us to leave home just now—as—as—eh?"

"Oh, anything will do."

"As baby is not very well? That's the usual polite thing, eh?"

"Oh, no, *don't* say that," says Mrs. Monkton, in a little frightened tone. "It—it's unlucky! It might—I'm not a bit superstitious, Freddy, but it might affect baby in some way—do him some harm."

"Very well, we'll tell another lie," says Mr. Monkton cheerfully. "We'll say you've got the neuralgia badly, and that the doctor says it would be as much as your life is worth to cross the Channel at this time of year."

"That will do very well," says Mrs. Monkton readily.

"But—I'm not a bit superstitious either," says he solemnly. "But it might affect *you* in some way, do you some harm, and—"

"If you are going to make a jest of it, Freddy!—"

"It is you who have made the jest. Well; never mind, I accept the responsibility, and will create even another tara-diddle. If I say we are disinclined to leave home just now, will that do?"

"Yes," says she, after a second's struggle with her better self, in which it comes off the loser.

"That's settled then," says Mr. Monkton. "Peace with honour is assured. Let us forget that unfortunate letter, and all the appurtenances thereof."

"Yes. Do let us, Freddy," says she, as if with all her heart.

* * * * *

But the morning convinces Monkton that the question of the letter still remains unsettled. Barbara for one thing has come down to breakfast, gowned in her very best morning frock, one reserved for those rare occasions when people drop in over night and sleep with them. She has indeed all the festive appearance of a person who ex-

pects to be called away at a second's notice into a very vortex of dissipation.

Joyce, who is quite as impressed as Monkton with her appearance, gazes at her with a furtive amazement, and both she and Monkton wait in a sort of studied silence to know the meaning of it. They aren't given long to possess their souls in patience.

"Freddy, I don't think Mabel ought to have any more jam," says Mrs. Monkton presently, "or Tommy either." She looks at the children as she speaks, and sighs softly. "It will cost a great deal," says she.

"The jam?" says her husband. "Well, really, at the rate they are consuming it—I—"

"Oh, no. The railway—the boat—the fare—the whole journey," says she.

"The *journey*?" says Joyce.

"Why to England, to take them over there to see their grandmother," says Mrs. Monkton calmly.

“ But, Barbara——”

“ Well, dear ? ”

“ I thought——”

“ Barbara ! I really considered that question decided,” says her husband, not severely, however. *Is* the dearest wish of his heart to be accomplished at last. “ I thought you had finally made up your mind to refuse my mother’s invitation ? ”

“ *I* shall not refuse it,” says she slowly, “ whatever *you* may do.”

“ *I* ? ”

“ You said you didn’t want to go,” says his wife severely. “ But I have been thinking it over, and——” Her tone has changed, and a slight touch of pink has come into her pretty cheeks. “ After all, Freddy, why should I be the one to keep you from your people ? ”

“ You aren’t keeping me. Don’t go on that.”

“ Well, then, will you go by yourself and see them ? ”

"Certainly not."

"Not even if I give you the children to take over?"

"Not even then."

"You see," says she, with a sort of sad triumph, "I *am* keeping you from them. What I mean is, that if you had never met me you would now be friends with them."

"I'd a great deal rather be friends with you," says he, struggling wildly but firmly with a mutton chop that has been done to death by a bad cook.

"I know that," in a low and troubled tone, "but I know, too, that there is always unhappiness where one is on bad terms with one's father and mother."

"My dear girl, I can't say what bee you have got in your bonnet now, but I beg you to believe I am perfectly happy at this present moment, in spite of this confounded chop that has been done to a chip. 'God sends meat, the devil sends cooks.' That's

not a prayer, Tommy, you needn't commit it to memory."

"But there's 'God' and the 'devil' in it," says Tommy, sceptically, "that always means prayers."

"Not *this* time. And you can't pray to *both*; your mother has taught you that; you should teach her something in return. That's only fair, isn't it?"

"She knows everything," says Tommy, dejectedly. It is quite plain to his hearers that he regrets his mother's universal knowledge--that he would have dearly liked to give her a lesson or two.

"Not everything," says his father. "For example, she cannot understand that I am the happiest man in the world; she imagines I should be better off if she was somebody else's wife and somebody else's mother."

"Whose mother?" demands Tommy, his eyes growing round.

"Ah, that's just it. You must ask her. She has evidently some *arrière pensée*."

"Freddy," says his wife, in a low tone.

"Well ! What am I to think ? You see," to Tommy, who is now deeply interested, "if she wasn't *your* mother, she'd be somebody else's."

"No, she wouldn't," breaks in Tommy, indignantly. "I wouldn't *let* her, I'd hold on to her. I—" with his mouth full of strawberry jam, yet striving nobly to overcome his difficulties of expression, "I'd *beat* her !"

"You shouldn't usurp my privileges," says his father, mildly.

"Barbara," says Joyce at this moment. "If you have decided on going to London, I think you have decided wisely ; and it may not be such an expense after all. You and Freddy can manage the two eldest children very well on the journey, and I can look after baby until you return. Or else, take nurse, and leave baby entirely to me."

Mrs. Monkton makes a quick movement.

CHAPTER XIV.

“And I go to brave a world I hate
 And woo it o'er and o'er,
And tempt a wave, and try a fate
 Upon a stranger shore.”

“I SHALL take the three children and you *too*, or I shall not go at all,” says she, addressing her sister with an air of decision.

“If you have really made up your mind about it,” says Mr. Monkton, “I agree with you. The house in Harley Street is big enough for a regiment, and my mother says the servants will be in it on our arrival, if we accept the invitation. Joyce will be a great comfort to us, and a help on the journey over, the children are so fond of her.”

Joyce turns her face to her brother-in-law and smiles in a little pleased way. She has been so grave of late that they welcome a smile from her now at any time, and even

court it. The pretty lips, erstwhile so prone to laughter, are now too serious by far. When, therefore, Monkton or his wife go out of their way to gain a pleased glance from her and *succeed*, both feel as though they had achieved a victory.

"Why have they offered us a separate establishment? Was there no room for us in their own house?" asks Mrs. Monkton presently.

"I daresay they thought we should be happier, so; in a place of our own."

"Well, I daresay we shall." She pauses for a moment. "Why are they in town now—at this time of year? Why are they not in their country house?"

"Ah! that is a last thorn in their flesh," says Monkton, with a quick sigh. "They have had to let the old place to pay my brother's debts. He is always a trouble to them. This last letter points to greater trouble still."

"And in their trouble they have turned

to you—to the little grandchildren," says Joyce, softly. "One can understand it."

"Oh, yes. Oh, you should have *told* me," says Barbara, flushing as if with pain. "I am the hardest person alive, I think. You think it?" looking directly at her husband.

"I think only one thing of you," says Mr. Monkton, rising from the breakfast-table with a slight laugh. "It is what I have always thought, that you are the dearest and loveliest thing on earth." The bantering air he throws into this speech does not entirely deprive it of the truthful tenderness that formed it. "There," says he, "that ought to take the gloom off the brow of any well-regulated woman, coming as it does from an eight-year-old husband."

"Oh, you *must* be older than that," says she, at which they all laugh together.

"You are wise to go, Barbara," says Joyce, now in a livelier way, as if that last quick, unexpected feeling of amusement has roused her to a sharper sense of life. "If

once they *see* you!—No, you mustn't put up your shoulder like that—I tell you, if once they looked at you, they would feel the measure of their folly."

"I shall end by fancying myself," says Mrs. Monkton impatiently, "and then you will all have fresh work cut out for you; the bringing of me back to my proper senses. Well," with a sigh, "as I *have* to see them, I wish——"

"What?"

"That I could be a heartier believer in your and Joyce's flattery, or else that they, your people, were not so prejudiced against me. It will be an ordeal."

"When you are about it, wish them a few grains of common sense," says her husband wrathfully. "Just fancy the folly of an impertinence that condemned a fellow-being on no evidence whatsoever; neither eye nor ear was brought in as witnesses."

"Oh, well," says she, considerably mollified by his defamation of his people, "I

daresay they are not so much to be blamed after all. And," with a little, quick laugh at her sister, "as Joyce says, my beauties are still unknown to them ; they *will* be delighted when they see me."

"They will indeed," returns Joyce stolidly. "And so you are really going to take me with you. Oh, I *am* glad. I haven't spent any of my money this winter, Barbara ; I have some, therefore, and I have always wanted to see London."

"It will be a change for the children too," says Barbara, with a troubled sigh. "I suppose," to her husband, "they will think them very countrified."

"Who ?"

"Your mother——"

"What do you think of them ?"

"Oh, that has got nothing to do with it."

"Everything rather. You are analyzing them. You are exalting an old woman who has been unkind to you at the expense of the children who love you ! "

"Ah, she analyzes them because she too loves them!" says Joyce. "It is easy to pick faults in those who have a real hold upon our hearts. For the rest—it doesn't concern us how the world regards *them*."

"It sounds as if it ought to read the other way round," says Monkton.

"No, no. To love is to see faults, not to be blind to them. The old reading is wrong," says Joyce.

"You are unfair, Freddy," declares his wife with dignity; "I would not decry the children. I am only a little nervous as to their reception. When I know that your father and mother are prepared to receive them as *my* children, I know they will get but little mercy at their hands."

"That speech isn't like you," says Monkton, "but it is impossible to blame you for it."

"They are the dearest children in the world," says Joyce. "Don't think of them. They *must* succeed. Leave them alone to fight their own battles."

" You may certainly depend upon Tommy," says his father. " For any emergency that calls for fists and heels, where battle, murder and sudden death are to be looked for, Tommy will be all there."

" Oh ! I do hope he will be good," says his mother, half amused, but plainly half terrified as well.

* * * *

Two weeks later sees them settled in town, in the Harley Street house, that seems enormous and unfriendly to Mrs. Monkton, but delightful to Joyce and the children, who wander from room to room and, under her guidance, pretend to find bears and lions and bogies in every corner.

The meeting between Barbara and Lady Monkton had not been satisfactory. There had been very little said on either side, but the chill that lay on the whole interview had never thawed for a moment.

Barbara had been stiff and cold, if entirely

polite, but not at all the Barbara to whom her husband had been up to this accustomed. He did not blame her for the change of front under the circumstances, but he could hardly fail to regret it, and it puzzled him a great deal to know how she did it.

He was dreadfully sorry about it secretly, and would have given very much more than the whole thing was worth to let his father and mother see his wife as she really is—the true Barbara.

Lady Monkton had been stiff too ; unpardonably so—as it was certainly her place to make amends, to soften and smooth down the preliminary embarrassment. But then she had never been framed for suavity of any sort ; and an old aunt of Monkton's, a sister of hers, had been present during the interview, and had helped considerably to keep up the frigidity of the atmosphere.

She was not a bad old woman at heart, this aunt. She had indeed from time to time given up all her own small patrimony

to help her sister to get the eldest son out of his many disreputable difficulties. She had done this, partly for the sake of the good old family names on both sides, and partly because the younger George Monkton was very dear to her.

From his early boyhood the Scapegrace of the family had been her admiration, and still remained so—in imagination. For years she had not seen him, and perhaps this (that *she* considered a grievance) was a kindness vouchsafed to her by Providence. Had she seen the pretty boy of twenty years ago as he now is she would not have recognised him. The change from the merry, blue-eyed, daring lad of the past, to the bloated, blear-eyed, reckless-looking man of to-day, would have been a shock too cruel for her to bear. But this she was not allowed to realise, and so remained true to her belief in him, as she remembered him.

In spite of her many good qualities, she was, nevertheless, a dreadful woman; the

more dreadful to the ordinary visitor because of the false front she wore, and the flashing purchased teeth that shone in her upper jaw. She lived entirely with Sir George and Lady Monkton, having indeed given them every penny that would have enabled her to live elsewhere. Perhaps of all the many spites they owed their elder son, the fact that his iniquities had inflicted upon them his maternal aunt for the rest of her natural days, was the one that rankled keenest.

She disliked Frederic, not only intensely, but with an openness that had its disadvantages—not for any greater reason than that he had behaved himself so far in his journey through life more creditably than his brother. She had always made a point against him of his undutiful marriage, and never failed to add fuel to the fire of his father's and mother's resentment about it, whenever that fire seemed to burn low.

Altogether she was by no means an amiable old lady, and being very hideous into the

bargain, was not much run after by Society generally. She wasn't of the least consequence in any way, being not only old, but very poor ; yet people dreaded her, and would slip away round doors and corners to avoid her tongue. She succeeded, in spite of all drawbacks, in making herself felt ; and it was only one or two impervious beings, such as Dicky Browne for example (who knew the Monktons well, and was indeed distantly connected with them through his mother), who could endure her manners with any attempt at equanimity.

CHAPTER XV.

“Strength, wanting judgment and policy to rule, overturneth itself.”

IT was quite impossible, of course, that a first visit to Lady Monkton should be a last from Barbara. Lady Monkton had called on her the very day after her arrival in town, but Barbara had been out then. On the occasion of the latter’s return visit the old woman had explained that going out was a trial to her, and Barbara, in spite of her unconquerable dislike to her, had felt it to be her duty to go and see her now and then. The children too had been a great resource. Sir George, especially, had taken to Tommy, who was quite unabashed by the grandeur of the stately, if faded, old rooms in the Town mansion, but was full of curiosity, and spent his visits to his grandfather cross-examining

him about divers matters—questionable and otherwise—that tickled the old man, and kept him laughing.

It had struck Barbara that Sir George had left off laughing for some time. He looked haggard—uneasy—miserably expectant. She liked him better than she liked Lady Monkton, and though reserved with both, relaxed more to him than to her mother-in-law. For one thing, Sir George had been unmistakably appreciative of her beauty, and her soft voice and pretty manners. He liked them all. Lady Monkton had probably noticed them quite as keenly, but they had not pleased her. They were indeed an offence. They had placed her in the wrong. As for old Miss L'Estrange, the aunt, she regarded the young wife from the first with a dislike she took no pains to conceal.

This afternoon, one of many that Barbara has given up to duty, finds her as usual in Lady Monkton's drawing-room, listening to her mother-in-law's comments on this and

that, and trying to keep her temper, for Frederic's sake, when the old lady finds fault with her management of the children.

The latter (that is, Tommy and Mabel) have been sent to the pantomime by Sir George, and Barbara with her husband have dropped in towards the close of the day to see Lady Monkton, with a view to recovering the children there, and taking them home with them, Sir George having expressed a wish to see the little ones after the play, and hear Tommy's criticisms on it, which he promised himself would be lively. He had already a great belief in the powers of Tommy's descriptions.

In the meantime the children have not returned, and conversation, it must be confessed, languishes. Miss L'Estrange, who is present, in a cap of enormous dimensions, and a temper calculated to make life hideous to her neighbours, scarcely helps to render more bearable the dulness of everything. Sir George in a corner, is buttonholing Frederic,

and saddening him with last accounts of the Scapegrace.

Barbara has come to her final pretty speech—silence seems imminent—when suddenly Lady Monkton flings into it a bombshell that explodes, and carries away with it all fear of commonplace dulness at all events.

“ You have a sister, I believe,” says she to Barbara in a tone she fondly but erroneously imagines gracious.

“ Yes,” says Barbara softly, but curtly. The fact that Joyce’s existence has never hitherto been alluded to by Lady Monkton renders her manner even colder than usual—which is saying everything.

“ She lives with you ? ”

“ Yes,” says Barbara again.

Lady Monkton, as if a little put out by the determined taciturnity of her manner, moves forward on her seat, and pulls the lace lappets of her dove grey cap more over to the front impatiently. Long, soft lappets they are, falling from a gem of a little cap,

made of priceless lace, and with a beautiful old face beneath to frame. A face like an old miniature ; and as stern as most of them, but charming for all that, and perfect in every line.

“ Makes herself useful no doubt,” growls Miss L'Estrange from the opposite lounge, her evil old countenance glowing with the desire to offend. “ That's why one harbours one's poor relations—to get something out of them.”

This is a double-barrelled explosion. One barrel for the detested wife of the good Frederic, one for the sister she has befriended —to that sister's cost.

“ True,” says Lady Monkton, with an uncivil little upward glance at Barbara. For once—because it suits her—she has accepted her sister's argument, and determined to take no heed of her scarcely veiled insult. “ She helps you, no doubt. Is useful with the children I *hope*. Moneyless girls should remember that they are born into the world to work, not to idle.”

"I am afraid she is not as much help to me as you evidently think necessary," says Barbara smiling, but not pleasantly. "She is very seldom at home ; in the summer at all events." It is abominable to her to think that these hateful old people should regard Joyce, her pretty Joyce, as a mere servant —a sisterly maid-of-all-work.

"And if not with you—where then ?" asks Lady Monkton, indifferently, and as if more with a desire to keep up the dying conversation than from any acute thirst for knowledge.

"She stays a good deal with Lady Baltimore," says Barbara, feeling weary, and angry, and rather disgusted.

"Ah ! Indeed ! Sort of companion—a governess I suppose ?"

A long pause. Mrs. Monkton's dark eyes grow dangerously bright, and a quick colour springs into her cheeks.

"No !" begins she, in a low, but indignant tone, and then suppresses herself. She

can't—she *mustn't* quarrel with Freddy's people ! "My sister is neither companion nor governess to Lady Baltimore," says she icily. "She is only—her friend."

"Friend ?" repeats the old lady, as if not quite understanding.

"A great friend," repeats Barbara calmly. Lady Monkton's astonishment is even more insulting than her first question. But Barbara has made up her mind to bear all things.

"There are friends and *friends*," puts in Miss L'Estrange, with her most offensive air.

A very embarrassing silence falls on this. Barbara would say nothing more—an inborn sense of dignity forbidding her—but this does not prevent a very natural desire, on her part, to look at her husband, not so much to claim his support as to know if he has heard.

One glance assures her that he has. A pause in the conversation with his father has enabled him to hear everything. Barbara has just time to note that his brow is black,

and his lips ominously compressed before she sees him advance towards his mother.

“ You seem to be very singularly ignorant of my wife’s status in Society——” he is beginning in a rather terrible tone, when Barbara, with a little graceful gesture checks him. She puts out her hand and smiles up at him, a wonderful smile under the circumstances.

“ Ah ! that is just it,” she says sweetly, but with determination. “ She *is* ignorant where we are concerned—Joyce and I. If she had only spared time to ask a little question or two ! But as it is——” The whole speech is purposely vague, but full of contemptuous rebuke, delicately veiled. This small revenge she permits herself. “ It is nothing I assure you, Freddy. Your mother is not to be blamed. She has not understood. That is all.”

“ I fail even now to understand,” says the old lady, with a somewhat tremulous attempt at self-assertion.

"So do I," says the antique upon the lounge near her, bristling with a wrath so warm that it has unsettled the noble structure on her head, and placed it in quite an artful situation, right over her left ear. "I see nothing to create wrath in the mind of anyone, in the idea of a young—er——" She comes to a dead pause, she had plainly been going to say young person—but Frederic's glare has been too much for her. It has frightened her into good behaviour, and she changes the obnoxious word into one more complaisant.

"A young *what?*?" demands he imperiously, freezing his aunt with a stony stare.

"Young *girl!*!" returns she, toning down a little, but still betraying malevolence of a very advanced order in her voice and expression. "I see nothing derogatory in the idea of a young girl devoid of fortune taking a——"

Again she would have said something insulting. The word "situation" is on her

lips, but the venom in her is suppressed a second time by her nephew.

"Go on," says he sternly.

"Taking a—er—*position* in a nice family," says she, almost spitting out the words like a bad old cat.

"She has a position in a very nice family," says Monkton readily. "In mine! As companion, friend, playfellow, in fact anything you like of the light order of servitude. We *all* serve, my dear aunt, though that idea doesn't seem to have come home to you. We must all be in bondage to each other in this world—the only real freedom is to be gained in the world to come. You have never thought of *that*? Well, think of it now. To be kind, to be sympathetic, to be even commonly civil to people is to fulfil the law's demands."

"You go too far; she is old, Freddy," Barbara has scarcely time to whisper, when the door is thrown open, and Dicky Browne, followed by Felix Dysart, enter the room.

It is a relief to everybody. Lady Monkton rises to receive them, with a smile. Miss L'Estrange looks into the teapot. Plainly she can still see some tea-leaves there. Rising, she inclines the little silver kettle over them and creates a second Deluge. She has again made tea. May she be forgiven !

“Going to give us some tea, Miss L'Estrange ?” says Dicky, bearing down upon her with a beaming face. She has given him some before this. “One can always depend upon you for a *good* cup. Ah, thanks. Dysart ; I can recommend this. *Have a cup ; do.*”

“No, thank you,” says Dysart, who has secured a seat next to Barbara, and is regarding her anxiously, whilst replying to her questions of surprise at seeing him in Town at this time of year. She is surprised, too, and a little shocked to see him look so ill.

Dicky is still holding a brilliant conver-

sation with Miss L'Estrange, who, to him, is a joy for ever.

" Didn't expect to see me here again so soon, eh ! " says he, with a cheerful smile.

" There you are wrong," returns that spinster, in the hoarse croak that distinguishes her. " The fact that you were here yesterday and couldn't reasonably be supposed to come again for a week, made it at once a certainty that you would turn up immediately. The unexpected is what always happens where you are concerned."

" One of my many charms," says Mr. Browne, gaily, hiding his untasted cup, by a skilful movement, behind the sugar bowl. " Variety, you know, is ever charming. I'm a various person ; therefore *I'm* charming."

" *Are you ?*" says Miss L'Estrange, grimly.

" Can you look at me and doubt it ? " demands Mr. Browne, deep reproach in his eyes.

" I can," returns Miss L'Estrange, presenting an uncompromising front. " I can

also suggest to you that those lumps of sugar are meant to put in the cups *with* the tea, not to be consumed wholesale. Sugar, plain, is ruinous to the stomach, and disastrous to the teeth."

"True, true," says Mr. Browne, absently, "and both mine are so pretty."

Miss L'Estrange rises to her feet, and confronts him with a stony glare.

"Both *what?* " demands she.

"Eh? Why, both of *them*," persists Mr. Browne.

"I think, Richard, that the sooner you return to your hotel, or whatever low haunt you have chosen as your present abode, the better it will be for all present."

"Why so?" demands Mr. Browne, indignantly. "What have I done now?"

"You know very well, sir," says Miss L'Estrange, "your language is disgraceful. You take an opportunity of turning an innocent remark of mine, a kindly warning into a ribald——"

"Good heavens!" says he, uplifting brows and hands. "I never yet knew it was ribaldry to talk about one's teeth."

"You were *not* talking about your teeth," says Miss L'Estrange sternly. "You said distinctly, '*both of them.*'"

"Just so," says Dicky. "I've only got two."

"Is that the truth, Richard?" with increasing majesty.

"Honest Injun!" says Mr. Browne, unabashed. "And *they* are out of sight. All you can see have been purchased, and I assure you, dear Miss L'Estrange," with anxious earnestness, "paid for. One guinea the entire set; a single tooth, two-and-six. Who'd be without 'em?"

"Well, I'm sorry to hear it," says Miss L'Estrange, reseating herself and regarding him still with manifest distrust. "To lose one's teeth so early in life, speaks badly for one's moral conduct. Anyhow, I shan't allow you to destroy your guinea's

worth. I shall remove temptation from your path."

Lifting the sugar-bowl, she removes it to her right side, thus laying bare the fact that Mr. Browne's cup of tea is still full to the brim.

It is the last stroke.

"Drink your tea," says she to the stricken Dicky in a tone that admits of no delay. He drinks it.

Meantime, Barbara has been very kind to Felix Dysart. Answering his roundabout questions that always have Joyce as their central meaning. One leading remark of his is to the effect that he is covered with astonishment to find her and Monkton in London. *Is* he surprised? Well, no doubt, yes. Joyce is in Town, too, but she has not come out with her to-day. Have they been to the theatre? Very often; Joyce, specially, is quite devoted to it. Do they go much to the picture galleries? Well, to one or two. There is so *much* to be done,

and the children are rather *exigeant*, and demand all the afternoon. But she had heard Joyce say that she was going to-morrow to Doré's Gallery. She thought Tommy ought to be shown something more improving than clowns, and wild animals, and toy-shops.

Mr. Dysart, at this point, said he thought Miss Kavanagh was more reflective than one taking a careless view of her might believe.

Barbara laughed.

"Do you take the reflective view?" says she.

"Do you recommend me to take the careless one?" demands he, now looking fully at her. There is a good deal of meaning in his question, but Barbara declines to recognise it. She feels she has gone far enough in that little betrayal about Doré's Gallery. She refuses to take another step; she is already, indeed, a little frightened by what she has done. If Joyce should hear of it—oh!—And yet how could she

refrain from giving that small push to so deserving a cause ?

"No, no ; I recommend nothing," says she, still laughing. "Where are you staying ? "

"With my cousins, the Seaton Dysarts. They had to come up to Town about a tooth, or a headache, or neuralgia, or something ; we shall never quite know what, as it has disappeared, whatever it is. Give me London smoke as a perfect cure for most ailments. It is astonishing what remarkable recoveries it can boast. Vera and her husband are like a couple of children. Even the pantomime isn't too much for them."

"That reminds me, the children ought to be here by this time," says Mrs. Monkton, drawing out her watch. "They went to the afternoon performance. I really think," anxiously, "they are very late——"

She has hardly spoken when a sound of little running feet up the stairs, outside, sets her maternal fears at rest. Nearer and

nearer they sound ; they stop ; there is a distinct scuffle, the door is thrown violently open, and Tommy and Mabel literally *fall* into the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

“ Then seemed to me this world far less in size,
Likewise it seemed to me less wicked far;
Like points in heaven I saw the stars arise,
And longed for wings that I might catch a star.”

LEAST said, soonest mended ! Tommy is on his feet again in no time, and has picked up Mabel before you could say Jack Robinson, and once again, nothing daunted by their ignominious *entrée*, they rush up the room, and precipitate themselves upon their mother. This pious act being performed, Tommy sees fit to show some small attention to the other people present.

“ Thomas,” says Mr. Browne, when he has shaken hands with him, “if you wait much longer without declaring yourself you will infallibly burst, and that is always a rude thing to do in a friend’s drawing-room.

Speak, Thomas, or die—you are evidently full of information!"

"Well, I won't tell *you*!" says Tommy, naturally indignant at this address. He throws a resentful look at him over his shoulder while making his way to his grandfather. There is a queer sort of sympathy—understanding—what you will—between the child and the stern old man.

"Come here," says Sir George, drawing Tommy to him. "Well, and did you enjoy yourself? Was it all your fancy painted it?"

Sir George has sunk into a chair with all the heaviness of an old man, and the boy has crept between his knees, and is looking up at him with his beautiful little face all aglow.

"Oh! 'twas *lovely*!" says he. "'Twas *splendid*! There was lights all over the house. 'Twas like night—only 'twasn't night, and that was *grand*! And there were heaps of people. A whole town was there. And

there were——Grandpa ! why did they have lamps there when it was daytime ? ”

“ Because they have no windows in a theatre,” says Sir George, patting the little hot fat hand that is lying on his arm with a strange sensation of pleasure in the touch of it.

“ *No windows?* ” with big eyes opened wide.

“ Not one.”

“ Then why have *we* windows ? ” asks Tommy, with an involuntary glance round him. “ Why are there windows *anywhere* ? It’s ever so much nicer without them. Why can’t we have lamps always, like the theatre people ? ”

“ Why, indeed ? ” says Mr. Browne, sympathetically. “ Sir George, I hope you will take your grandson’s advice to heart, and block up all these absurd windows, and let a proper ray of light descend upon us from the honest burner. Who cares for strikes ? Not I ! ”

"Well, Tommy, we'll think about it," says Sir George. "And now go on. You saw——?"

"Bluebeard!" says Tommy, almost roaring in the excitement of his delight. "A *big* Bluebeard, and he was just like the pictures of him at home, with his toes curled up, and a red towel round his head, and a blue nightgown, and a smiter in his hand."

"A scimitar, Tommy," suggests his mother gently.

"Eh?" says Tommy. "Well, it's all the same," says he, after a pause, replete with deep research, and with a truly noble impartiality.

"It is, indeed!" says Mr. Browne, open encouragement in his eye. "And so you saw Mr. Bluebeard! And did he see you?"

"Oh! he saw *me*!" cries Mabel, in a little whimpering tone. "He looked straight into the little house where we were, and I saw his eye—his *horrid* eye!" shaking her

small head vigorously—"and it ran right into mine, and he began to walk up to me, and I——"

She stops, her pretty red lips quivering, her blue eyes full of tears.

"Oh, Mabel was frightened!" says Tommy the Bold. "She stuck her nose into nurse's fur cape and roared!"

"I *didn't!*!" says Mabel, promptly.

"~~You~~ You did!" says Tommy, indignant at being contradicted, "and she said it would never be worth a farthing ever after, and—— Well, anyway, you know, Mabel, you didn't like the *heads*."

"Oh, no, I didn't—I hated them! They were all hanging to one side; and there was nasty blood, and they looked as if they was going to *waggle*," concludes Mabel, with a terrified sob, burying her own head in her mother's lap.

"Oh! she is too young," says Barbara, nervously, clasping her little woman close to her in a quiet, undemonstrative way, but

so as to make the child herself feel the protection of her arms.

"Too young for so dismal a sight," says Dysart, stooping over and patting Mabel's sunny curls with a kindly touch. He is very fond of children, as are all men, good and bad.

"I should not have let her go," says Mrs. Monkton, with self-reproach. "Such exhibitions are painful for young minds, however harmless."

"When she is older——" begins Dysart, still caressing the little head.

"Yes, yes—she is too young—*far* too young," says Mrs. Monkton, giving the child a second imperceptible hug.

"One is *never* too young to learn the miseries of the world," says Miss L'Estrange, in her most terrible tone. "Why should a child be pampered and petted, and shielded from all thoughts of harm and wrong, as though they never existed? It is false treatment. It is a wilful deceiving of the growing mind. One day they must wake to all the

horrors of the world. They should therefore be prepared for it, steadily, sternly, unyieldingly ! ”

“ What a grand—what a strong nature ! ” says Mr. Browne, uplifting his hands in admiration. “ You would, then, advocate the cause of the pantomime ! ” says he, knowing well that the very name of Theatre stinks in the nostrils of Miss L'Estrange.

“ Far be it from me ! ” says she, with a violent shake of her head. “ May all such disreputable performances come to a bad end, and a speedy one, is my devout prayer. But,” with a vicious glance at Barbara, “ I would condemn the parents who would bring their children up in a dark ignorance of the woes and vices of the world in which they must pass their lives. I think, as Mabel has been permitted to look at the pernicious exhibition of this afternoon, she should also be encouraged to look with calmness upon it, if only to teach her what to expect from life.”

"Good heavens!" says Mr. Browne in a voice of horror. "Is *that* what she has to expect? Rows of decapitated heads! Have you had private information, Miss L'Estrange? Is a rehearsal of the French Revolution to be performed in London? Do you really believe the poor child is doomed to behold your head carried past the windows on a pike? Was there meaning in the artless prattle of our Thomas just now when he condemned windows as a social nuisance, or——"

"I suppose you think you are amusing!" interrupts the spinster, malignantly. It is plain that she objects to the idea of her head being on a pike. "At all events, if you must jest on serious subjects, I *desire* you, Richard, to leave *me* out of your silly maunderings."

"Your will is my law," says Dicky, rising.
"I leave you!"

He makes a tragic retreat, and finding an empty chair near Monkton takes possession of it.

"I must protest against your opinion," says Dysart, addressing Miss L'Estrange with a smile. "Children should be regarded as something better than mere lumps of clay to be experimentalized upon!"

"Oh, yes," says Barbara, regarding the spinster gently, but with ill-concealed aversion. "You cannot expect anyone to agree with you there. I, for one, could not."

"I don't know that I ever asked you to," says Miss L'Estrange with such open impertinence that Barbara flushes up to the roots of her hair.

Silence falls on the room, except for a light conversation being carried on between Dicky and Monkton, both of whom have heard nothing. Lady Monkton looks uncomfortable; Sir George hastens to the rescue.

"Surely you haven't told us everything, Tommy?" says he, giving his grandson a little pull towards him. "Besides Mr. Bluebeard, what else was there?"

"Lots of things," says Tommy, vaguely,

coming back from an eager attention to Miss L'Estrange's evil suggestion to a fresh remembrance of his past delights. "There was a band, and it *shouted*. Nurse said it took the roof off her head, but I looked and her bonnet didn't *stir*. And there was the Harlequin, he was beautiful. He shined like anything. He was all over scales, like a trout."

"A queer fish," says his grandfather.

"He jumped about, and beat things with a little stick he had. And he danced, and there was a window and he sprang right through it, and he came up again and wasn't a bit hurt, not a *bit*. Oh ! he was lovely, grandpapa, and so was his concubine——"

"His *what*?" says Sir George.

"His concubine. His sweetheart. That was her name," says Tommy confidently.

There is a ghastly silence. Lady Monkton's pale old cheeks colour faintly. Miss L'Estrange glares. As for Barbara, she

feels the world has at last come to an end. They will be angry with the boy. Her mission to London will have failed—that vague hope of a reconciliation through the children that she had yet scarcely allowed to herself.

Need it be said that Mr. Browne has succumbed to secret, but disgraceful mirth. A good three quarters of a full-sized handkerchief is already in his mouth—a little more of the cambric, and “accidental death through suffocation,” will adorn the columns of *The Times* in the morning. Sir George, too, what is the matter with him? He is speechless — from indignation one must *hope*.

“What ails you, grandpa?” demands Tommy, after a full minute’s strict examination of him.

“Oh, nothing, nothing,” says Sir George, choking; “it is only—that I’m glad you have so thoroughly enjoyed yourself, and your harlequin, and — *ha, ha, ha*, your

Columbine. Columbine, now mind. And here's this for you, Tommy, because you are such a good boy."

He opens the little grandson's hand and presses into the pink palm of it a sovereign.

"Thank you," says Tommy, in the polite regulation tone he has been taught, without a glance at his gift—a touch of etiquette he has been taught too. Then the curious eyes of childhood wander to the palm, and seeing the unexpected pretty gold thing lying there, he colours up to the tips of his ears with surprise and pleasure. Then sudden compunction seizes on the kindly little heart. The world is strange to him. He knows but one or two here and there. His father is poor. A sovereign—that is, a gold piece—would be rare with him—why not rare with another? Though filled with admiration and gratitude for the giver of so big a gift, the child's heart commands him not to accept it.

"Oh, it is too much," says he, throwing his arms round Sir George's neck and trying to press the sovereign back into his hand. "A shilling I'd like, but that's such a lot of shillings, and maybe you'd be wanting it." This is all whispered in the softest, tenderest way.

"No, no, my boy," says Sir George whispering back, and glad that he must whisper. His voice, even so, sounds a little queer to himself. How often he might have gladdened this child with a present, a small one, and until now——"Keep it," says he; he has passed his hand round the little head and is pressing it against his breast.

"May I? Really?" says Tommy, emancipating his head with a little jerk, and looking at Sir George with searching eyes.

"You may indeed!"

"*God* bless you!" says Tommy solemnly.

It is a startling remark to Sir George, but not so to Tommy. It is exactly what

Nurse had said to her daughter the day before she left Ireland with Tommy and Mabel in charge, when her daughter had brought her the half of her wages. Therefore it *must* be correct. To supplement this blessing Tommy flings his arms around Sir George's neck and gives him a resounding kiss. Nurse had done that, too, to her daughter.

"God bless you, too, my dear," says Sir George, if not quite as solemnly, with considerably more tenderness. Tommy's mother, catching the words and the tone, cheers up. All is not lost yet ! The situation is saved. Tommy has won the day. The inconsequent Tommy of all people ! Insult to herself she had endured — but to have the children disliked would have been more than she could bear ; but Tommy, apparently, is not disliked—by the old man at all events. That fact will be sweet to Freddy. After all, who could resist Tommy ? Tears rise to the mother's eyes.

Darling boy ! Where is his like upon the whole wide earth ? Nowhere.

She is disturbed in her reverie by the fact that the originator of it is running towards her with one little closed fist outstretched. *How* he runs—his fat calves come twinkling across the carpet.

“ See, mammy, what I’ve got. Grandpa gave it to me. Isn’t he nice ? Now I’ll buy a watch like pappy’s.”

“ You have made him very happy,” says Barbara, smiling at Sir George over her boy’s head. She rises as she speaks, and goes to where Lady Monkton is sitting, to bid her good-bye.

“ I hope you will come soon again,” says Lady Monkton, not cordially, but as if compelled to it ; “ and I hope, too,” pausing as if to gather herself together, “ that when you do come you will bring your sister with you. It will give me—us—pleasure to see her.” There is such a dearth of pleasure in the tone of the invitation

that Barbara feels her wrath rising within her.

"Thank you," she manages to say very calmly, not committing herself either way, and presently finds herself in the street with her husband and her children. They had declined Lady Monkton's offer of the brougham to take them home.

"It was a bad time," says Monkton, whilst waiting at a crossing for a cab to come to them. "But you must try and not mind them. If the fact that I am always with you counts for anything, it may help you to endure it."

"What help could be like it?" says she, tightening her hand on his arm.

"That old woman, my aunt. She offended you, but you must remember that she offends everybody. You thought her abominable?"

"Oh, no. I only thought her vulgar," says Mrs. Monkton. It is the one revenge she permits herself. Monkton breaks into an irresistible laugh.

"It isn't perfect ; it *couldn't* be unless she heard you," says he. The cab has come up now, and he puts in the children and then his wife, finally himself.

"Tommy crowns all !" says he with a retrospective smile.

"Eh ?" says Tommy, who has the ears of a Midas.

"Your father says you are a social success, and so does your mother," says Barbara, smiling at the child's puzzled face, and then giving him a loving little embrace.

CHAPTER XVII.

“ Why should two hearts in one breast lie
And yet not lodge together?
O, love! where is thy sympathy
If thus our breasts you sever ! ”

“ WELL, did you like the Gallery ? ” asks Mrs. Monkton, throwing aside her book to greet Joyce as she returns from Doré’s. It is next day, and Barbara had let the girl go to see the pictures without telling her of her meeting with Felix the evening before ; she had been afraid to say anything about him, lest that guilty secret of hers might transpire —that deliberate betrayal of Joyce’s intended visit to Bond Street on the morrow. If Joyce had heard *that*, she would, in all probability, have deferred her going there for ever—and—it was such a chance. Mrs. Monkton, who in her time had said so many hard words about match-makers, as most women have,

and who would have scorned to be classed with them, had promoted and desired this meeting of Felix and Joyce with all the energy and enthusiasm of which she was capable. But that Joyce should suspect her of the truth is a fear that terrifies her.

"Very much. So did Tommy. He is very graphic in his remarks," says Joyce, sinking listlessly into a chair, and taking off her hat. She looks vexed and preoccupied. "I think he gave several very original ideas on the subjects of the pictures to those around. They seemed impressed. You know how far above the foolish feeling, *mauvaise honte*, he is? his voice 'like a silver clarion rung.' Excelsior was outdone. Everybody turned and looked at him with——"

"I hope he wasn't noisy," says Mrs. Monkton, nervously.

"With admiration, I was going to say, but you wouldn't let me finish my sentence. Oh, yes, he was quite a success. One old gentleman wanted to know if he would

accept the part of art critic on his paper. It was very exciting." She leans back in her chair, the troubled look on her face growing intensified. She seems glad to be silent, and with downcast eyes plays with the gloves lying in her lap.

"Something has happened, Joyce," says her sister, going over to her.

"Something is happening always," returns Joyce, with a rather impatient smile.

"Yes, but to you just now."

"You are sure to make me tell you sooner or later," says Miss Kavanagh, "and even if I didn't, Tommy would. I met Mr. Dysart at that gallery to-day."

"Felix?" says Mrs. Monkton, feeling herself an abominable hypocrite, yet afraid to confess the truth. Something in the girl's whole attitude forbids a confession—at this moment at all events.

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Well?"

"He was glad to see you, darling?" very tenderly.

"Was he? I don't know. He looked very ill. He said he had had a bad cough. He is coming to see you."

"You were kind to him, Joyce?"

"I didn't personally insult him, if you mean that."

"Oh, no, I don't mean that, you *know* what I mean. He was ill, unhappy; you did not make him more unhappy?"

"It is always for *him!*" cries the girl, with jealous anger. "Is there never to be a thought for me? Am I nothing to you? Am *I* never unhappy? Why don't you ask if he was kind to me?"

"Was he ever unkind?"

"Well, you can forget! He said dreadful things to me—*dreadful*. *I* am not likely to forget them if you are. After all they did not hurt you."

"Joyce!"

"Yes, I know—I know everything you

would say. I am ungrateful, abominable, but ——He *was* unkind to me ! He said what no girl would ever forgive, and yet you have not one angry word for him."

"Never mind all that," says Mrs. Monkton, soothingly. "Tell me what you did to-day —what you said."

"As little as possible," defiantly. "I tell you I don't want ever to see him again, or hear of him ; I think I *hate* him. And he looked *dying*." She stops here, as if finding a difficulty about saying another word. She coughs nervously ; then, recovering herself, and as if determined to assert herself anew and show how real is the coldness that she has declared—"Yes, dying, I think," she says stubbornly.

"Oh, I don't think he looked as bad as that !" says Barbara, hastily, unthinkingly —filled with grief—not only at this summary dismissal of poor Felix from our earthly sphere, but for her sister's unhappiness, which is as plain to her as though no little comedy

had been performed for the concealment of it.

“ *You don’t!* ” repeats Joyce, lifting her head and directing a piercing glance at her. “ You ! What do you know about him ? ”

“ Why—you just said——” stammers Mrs. Monkton, and then breaks down ignominiously.

“ You knew he was in Town,” says Joyce, advancing to her, and looking down on her with clasped hands and a pale face. “ Barbara, speak. You knew he was here, and never told me ; you,” with a sudden, fresh burst of inspiration, “ sent him to that place to-day to meet me.”

“ Oh, no, dearest. No, indeed. He himself can tell you. It was only that he——”

“ Asked where I was going to, at such and such an hour, and you told him.” She is still standing over poor Mrs. Monkton in an attitude that might almost be termed menacing.

"I didn't. I assure you, Joyce, you are taking it all quite wrongly. It was only——"

"Oh ! only—*only*," says the girl, contemptuously. "Do you think I can't read between the lines ? I am sure you believe you are sticking to the honest truth, Barbara, but still——Well," bitterly, "I don't think he profited much by the information you gave him. Your deception has given him small satisfaction."

"I don't think you should speak to me like that," says Mrs. Monkton, in a voice that trembles perceptibly.

"I don't care what I say," cries Joyce, with a sudden burst of passion. "You betray me ; he betrays me ; all the world seems arrayed against me. And what have I done to anybody ?" She throws out her hands protestingly.

"Joyce, darling, if you could only listen."

"Listen ! I am always listening, it seems to me. To him, to you, to everyone. I am tired of being silent ; I *must* speak now. I

trusted you, Barbara, and you have been bad to me. Do you want to force him to make love to me, that you tell him on the very first opportunity where to find me, and in a place where I am without you, or anyone, to——”

“ *Will* you try to understand ? ” says Mrs. Monkton, with a light stamp of her foot, her patience going as her grief increases. “ He cross-examined me as to where you were, and would be, and I—I told him. I wasn’t going to make a mystery of it, or *you*, was I ? I told him that you were going to the Doré Gallery to-day, with Tommy. How could I know he would go there to meet you ? He never said he was going. You are unjust, Joyce, both to him and to me.”

“ Do you mean to tell me, that for all that, you didn’t know he would be at that place to-day ? ” turning flashing eyes upon her sister.

“ How could I know ? Unless a person

says a thing right out, how is one to be sure what he is going to do ? ”

“ Oh ! that is unlike you. It is unworthy of you,” says Joyce, turning from her scornfully. “ You *did* know. And it is not,” turning back again, and confronting the now thoroughly frightened Barbara, with a glance full of pathos, “ it is not *that*—your insincerity—that hurts me so much—it is——”

“ I didn’t mean to be insincere ; you are very cruel—you do not measure your words.”

“ You will tell me next that you meant it all for the best,” with a bitter smile. “ That is the usual formula, isn’t it ? Well, never mind, perhaps you did. What I object to is that you didn’t *tell* me. That I was kept designedly in the dark both by him and you. Am I,” with sudden fire, “ a child or a fool, that you should seek to guide me so blindly ? Well,” drawing a long breath, “ I won’t keep *you* in the dark. When I left the Gallery, and your *protégé*, I met—Mr. Beauclerk ! ”

Mrs. Monkton, stunned by this intelligence, remains silent for a full minute. It is death to her hopes. If she has met *that man* again, it is impossible to know how things have gone. His fatal influence—her unfortunate infatuation for him—all will be ruinous to poor Felix's hopes.

"You spoke to him?" asks she at last, in an emotionless tone.

"Yes."

"Was Felix with you?"

"When?"

"When you met that *odious* man."

"Mr. Beauclerk? No; I dismissed Mr. Dysart as soon as ever I could."

"No doubt. And Mr. Beauclerk, did you dismiss him as promptly?"

"Certainly not. There was no occasion."

"No inclination either. You were kind to *him* at all events. It is only to the man who is honest and sincere that you are deliberately uncivil."

"I hope I was uncivil to neither of them."

"There is no use in your giving yourself that air with me, Joyce. You are angry with me; but why? only because I am anxious for your happiness. Oh! that hateful man, how I detest him! He has made you unhappy once—he will certainly make you unhappy again."

"I don't think so," says Joyce, taking up her hat and furs with the evident intention of leaving the room, and thus putting an end to the discussion.

"You will never think so, until it is too late. You haven't the strength of mind to throw him over, once and for all, and give your thoughts to one who is really worthy of you. On the contrary you spend your time comparing him favourably with that good and faithful Felix."

"You should put that down. It will do for his tombstone," says Miss Kavanagh, with a rather uncertain little laugh.

"At all events, it would not do for Mr. Beauclerk's tombstone—though I wish it

would—and that I could put it there *at once.*"

"I shall tell Freddy to read the Commandments to you," says Joyce, with a dreary attempt at mirth—"you have forgotten your duty to your neighbour."

"It is all true, however. You can't deny it, Joyce. You are deliberately—wilfully—throwing away the good for the bad. I can't bear to see it. I can't look on in silence and see you thus miserably destroying your life. How *can* you be so blind, darling?" appealing to her with hands, and voice and eyes. "Such determined folly would be strange in anyone; stranger far in a girl like you, whose sense has always been above suspicion."

"Did it ever occur to you," asks Joyce, in a slightly bantering tone, that but ill conceals the nervousness that is consuming her, "that you might be taking a wrong view of the situation? That I was not so blind after all. That I——what *was* it you

said?—that I spent my nights and days comparing the merits of Mr. Beauclerk with those of your friend, Felix Dysart—to your friend's discomfiture? Now, suppose that I *did* thus waste my time, and gave my veto in favour of Mr. Dysart? How would it be then? It might be so, you know, for all that he, or you, or anyone could say."

"It is not so light a matter that you should trifle with it," says Mrs. Monkton, with a faint suspicion of severity in her soft voice.

"No, of course not. You are right." Miss Kavanagh moves towards the door. "After all, Barbara," looking back at her, "that applies to most things in this sad old world. What matter under heaven can we poor mortals dare to trifle with? Not one I think. All bear within them the seeds of grief or joy. Sacred seeds, both carrying in their bosoms the germs of eternity. Even when *this* life is gone from us we must still face weal or woe."

"Still—we need not *make* our own woe,"

says Barbara, who is a sturdy enemy to all pessimistic thoughts. "Wait a moment, Joyce." She hurries after her, and lays her hand on the girl's shoulder. "Will you come with me next Wednesday to see Lady Monkton?"

"Lady Monkton! Why I thought——"

"Yes, I know. I would not take you there before, because she had not expressly asked to see you. But to-day she made a——she sent you a formal message—at all events she said she hoped I would bring you when I came again."

"Is that all of it?" asks Joyce, gazing at her sister with a curious smile, that is troubled, but has still some growing sense of amusement in it. "What an involved statement! Surely you have forgotten something. That Mr. Dysart was standing near you for example? and will probably find that it is absolutely imperative that he should call on Lady Monkton next Wednesday too? Don't set your heart on *that*, Barbara. I

think, after my interview with him to-day, he will not want to see Lady Monkton next Wednesday."

"I know nothing about whether he is to be there or not," says Barbara steadily. "But as Sir George likes to see the children very often, I thought of taking them there again on that day. It is Lady Monkton's day. And Dicky Browne, at all events, will be there, and I daresay a good many of your old friends. Do say you will come."

"*I hate* old friends?" says the girl fractiously. "*I don't believe I have* any. *I don't believe anybody has. I——*"

She pauses as the door is thrown open, and Tommy comes prancing into the room accompanied by his father.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Children know very little; but their capacity of comprehension is great."

"I've just been interviewing Tommy on the subject of the pictures," says Mr. Monkton. "So far as I can make out he disapproves of Doré."

"Oh! Tommy! and all such beautiful pictures out of the Bible," says his mother.

"I *did* like them," says Tommy. "Only some of them were queer. I wanted to know about them, but nobody would tell me—and—"

"Why, Tommy I explained them all to you," says Joyce reproachfully.

"You did in the first two little rooms and in the big room afterwards, where the velvet seats were. They," looking at his father, and raising his voice to an indignant

note, “wouldn’t let me run round on the top of them !”

“Good heavens !” says Mr. Monkton. “*Can* that be true ? Truly this country is going to the dogs.”

“Where do the dogs live ?” asks Tommy. “What dogs ? Why does the country want to go to them ?”

“It doesn’t want to go,” explains his father. “But it will *have* to go, and the dogs will punish them for not letting you reduce its velvet seats to powder. Never mind, go on with your story ; so that unnatural aunt of yours wouldn’t tell you about the pictures, eh ?”

“She did in the beginning, and when we got into the big room too, a *little* while. She told me about the great large one at the end, ‘Christ and the Historian,’ though I couldn’t see the Historian anywhere, and——”

“She herself must be a most successful one,” says Mr. Monkton, *sotto voce*.

“And then we came to the Innocents,

and I perfectly *hated* that," says Tommy. "'Twas frightful ! Everybody was as large as *that*," stretching out his arms and puffing out his cheeks, "and the babies were all so fat and so horrid. And then Felix came, and Joyce had to talk to him, so I didn't know any more."

"I think you forget," says Joyce. "There was that picture with lions in it. Mr. Dysart himself explained that to you."

"Oh, that one !" says Tommy as if dimly remembering, "the circus one ! The one with the round house. I didn't like that either."

"It *is* rather ghastly for a child," says his mother.

"*That's* not the one with the gas," puts in Tommy. "The one with the gas is just close to it, and has got Pilate's wife in it. She's very nice."

"But why didn't you like the other ?" asks his father. "I think it one of the best there."

“ Well *I* don’t ! ” says Tommy, evidently grieved at having to differ from his father ; but filled with a virtuous determination to stick to the truth through thick and thin.

“ No ? ”

“ ‘Tis unfair,” says Tommy.

“ That has been allowed for centuries,” says his father.

“ Then why don’t they change it ? ”

“ Change what ? ” asks Mr. Monkton feeling a little puzzled. “ How can one change now the detestable cruelties—or the abominable habits of the dark ages.”

“ But why were they dark ? ” asks Tommy. “ Mammy says they had gas then ! ”

“ I didn’t mean that, I——” his mother is beginning, but Monkton stops her with a despairing gesture.

“ Don’t ! ” says he. “ It would take a good hour by the slowest clock. Let him believe there was *electric* light then if he chooses.”

"Well, but why *can't* they change it?" persists Tommy, who is evidently full of the picture in question.

"I have told you."

"But the painter-man could change it?"

"I am afraid not, Tommy. He is dead."

"Why didn't he do it before he died then? Why didn't somebody show him what to do?"

"I don't fancy he wanted any hints. And besides, he had to be true to his ideal. It was a terrible time! They did really throw the Christians to the lions you know."

"Of course I know *that!*!" says Tommy with a superior air. "But why didn't they cast *another one?*?"

"*Eh?*" says Mr. Monkton.

"*That's* why it's unfair!" says Tommy. "There is one poor lion there, and he hasn't got any Christian! Why didn't Mr. Dory give *him* one?"

Tableau!

"Barbara!" says Mr. Monkton faintly,

after a long pause. “Is there any brandy in the house?”

But Barbara is looking horrified.

“It is shocking,” she says. “*Why* should he take such a twisted view of it. He has always been a kind-hearted child ; and now——”

“Well. He has been kind-hearted to the lions,” says Mr. Monkton. “No one can deny that.”

“Oh ! if you persist in encouraging him, Freddy !” says his wife with tears in her eyes.

“Believe me, Barbara,” breaks in Joyce at this moment. “It is a mistake to be soft-hearted in this world.” There is something bright but uncomfortable in the steady gaze she directs at her sister. “One should be *hard* ; if one means to live comfortably.”

“Will you take me soon again to see pictures ?” asks Tommy, running to Joyce and scrambling upon the seat she is occupying. “Do !”

"But if you dislike them so much."

"Only some. And other places may be funnier. What day will you take me?"

"I don't think I shall again make an arrangement *beforehand*," says Joyce, rising, and placing Tommy on the ground very gently. "Some morning, just before we start, you and I, we will make our plans."

She does not look at Barbara this time, but her tone is eloquent.

Barbara looks at her, however, with eyes full of reproach.

CHAPTER XIX.

“Love is its own great loveliness alway
And takes new beauties from the touch of time;
Its bough owns no December and no May,
But bears its blossoms into winter’s clime.”

“I have often thought what a melancholy world this would be, without children.”

“Oh, Felix—is it you !” says Mrs. Monkton in a dismayed tone. Her hansom is at the door—and arrayed in her best bib and tucker, she is hurrying through the hall, when Dysart, who has just come, presents himself. He was just coming in, in fact, as she was going out.

“Don’t mind me,” says he ; “there is always to-morrow.”

“Oh, yes—but——”

“And Miss Kavanagh ?”

“It is to recover her I am going out this afternoon.” It is the next day, so soon after her rupture with Joyce, that she is afraid to

even hint at further complications. A strong desire to let him know that he might wait and try his fortune once again on her return with Joyce, is oppressing her mind, but she puts it firmly behind her—or thinks she does. “She is lunching at the Brabazons’,” she says ; “old friends of ours. I promised to lunch there too, so as to be able to bring Joyce home again.”

“She will be back then ?”

“In an hour and a half at latest,” says Mrs. Monkton, who, after all, is not strong enough to be quite genuine to her better judgments. “But,” with a start and a fresh determination to be cruel in the cause of right, “that would be much too long for you to wait for us.”

“I shouldn’t think it long,” says he.

Mrs. Monkton smiles suddenly at him. How charming—how *satisfactory* he is. Could any lover be more devoted !

“Well, it *would* be for all that,” says she. “But,” hesitating in a last vain effort to dismiss him, and then losing herself, “suppose

you do not abandon your visit altogether ; that you go away now, and get your lunch at your club—I *feel*,” contritely, “ how inhospitable I am—and then come back again here about four o'clock. She—I—will have returned by that time.”

“ An excellent plan,” says he, his face lighting up. Then it clouds again. “ If she knows I am to be here ? ”

“ Ah ! that is a difficulty,” says Mrs. Monkton, her own pretty face showing signs of distress. “ But anyhow—*risk* it.”

“ I would rather she knew, however,” says he steadily. The idea of entrapping her into a meeting with him is abhorrent to him. He had had enough of that at the Doré Gallery ; though he had been innocent of any intentional deception there.

“ I will tell her then,” says Mrs. Monkton ; “ and in the meantime, go and get your——”

At this moment the door on her right is thrown open, and Tommy, with a war-whoop, descends upon them followed by Mabel.

"Oh ! it's *Felix!*" cries he joyfully. "Will you stay with us, Felix ? We've no one [to have dinner with us to-day. Because mammy is going away, and Joyce is gone, and pappy is nowhere ; and Nurse isn't a bit of good—she only says, 'take care you don't choke yourselves, me dearies !'" He imitates Nurse to the life. "And dinner will be here in a minute : Mary says she's just going to bring it upstairs."

"Oh, do—*do* stay with us," supplements little Mabel, thrusting her small hand imploringly into his. It is plain that he is in high favour with the children, however out of it with a certain other member of the family—and feeling grateful to them, Dysart hesitates to say the "No" that is on his lips. How hard it is to refuse the entreaties of these little clinging fingers—these eager, loving, upturned faces !

"If I *may*——?" says he at last, addressing Mrs. Monkton, and thereby giving in.

"Oh ! as for that ! You know you may,"

says she. "But you will perfectly hate it. It is too bad to allow you to accept their invitation. You will be bored to death, and you will detest the boiled mutton. There is only that and—rice, I think. I won't even be sure of the rice. It *may* be tapioca—and that is worse still."

"It's rice," says Tommy, who is great friends with the cook, and knows all her secrets.

"That decides the question," says Felix, gravely. "Everyone knows that I adore rice. It is my one weakness."

At this, Mrs. Monkton gives way to an irrepressible laugh, and he, catching the meaning of it, laughs too.

"You are wrong, however," says he, "that other is my one *strength*. I could not live without it. Well, Tommy, I accept your invitation, I shall stay and lunch—dine with you." In truth, it seems sweet in his eyes to remain in the house that she (Joyce) occupies; it will be easier

to wait, to hope for her return there, than elsewhere.

“Your blood be on your own head,” says Barbara solemnly. “If, however, it goes *too* far, I warn you there are remedies. When it occurs to you that life is no longer worth living, go to the library ; you will there find a revolver. It is three hundred years old, I’m told, and it is hung very high on the wall to keep it out of Freddy’s reach. Blow your brains out with it—if you *can*.”

“You’re awfully good, awfully thoughtful,” says Mr. Dysart, “but I don’t think when the final catastrophe arrives, it will be suicide. If I must murder *somebody*, it will certainly not be myself, it will be either the children or the mutton.”

Mrs. Monkton laughs, then turns a serious eye on Tommy.

“Now, Tommy,” says she, addressing him with a gravity that should have overwhelmed him. “I am going away from you for an hour or so, and Mr. Dysart has kindly ac-

cepted your invitation to lunch with him. I do hope," with increasing impressiveness, "you will be good."

"I hope so too," returns Tommy, genially.

There is an astonished pause, confined to the elders only, and then Mr. Dysart unable to restrain himself any longer bursts out laughing.

"Could anything be more candid?" says he. "More full of trust in himself, and yet, with a certain modesty withal! There! you can go, Mrs. Monkton, with a clear conscience. I am not afraid to give myself up to the open-handed dealing of your son." Then his tone changes—he follows her quickly as she turns from him to the children to bid them goodbye.

"Miss Kavanagh," says he, "is she well—happy?"

"She is well," says Barbara, stopping to look back at him with her hand on Mabel's shoulder—there is reservation in her answer.

"Had she any idea that I would call

to-day?" This question is absolutely forced from him.

"Well! Certainly I *thought* you would come some day, and soon, and," hesitating, "she may have thought so too, but—you should have told me when you were coming. You called *too soon*. Impatience is a vice!" says Mrs. Monkton, shaking her head in a very kindly fashion, however.

"I suppose when she knows—when," with a rather sad smile, "you tell her—I am to be here on her return this afternoon, she will not come with you."

"Oh, yes, she will. I think so. I am *sure* of it. But you must understand, Felix, that she is very peculiar, *difficult* is what they call it now-a-days. And," pausing and glancing at him, "she is angry, too, about something that happened before you left last autumn. I hardly know what, I have imagined only, and," rapidly, "don't let us go into it, but, you will know that there was something!"

"Something, yes," says he.

"Well, a trifle, probably. I have said she is difficult. But you failed somewhere, and she is slow to pardon—where——"

"*Where!* What does *that* mean?" demands the young man, a great spring of hope taking life within his eyes.

"Ah, that hardly matters. But she is not forgiving. She is the very dearest girl I know, but that is one of her faults."

"She has no faults," says he, doggedly. And then : "Well, she knows I am to be here this afternoon?"

"Yes. I told her," says Mrs. Monkton, making her confession at last and most unwillingly.

"I am glad of that. *If* she returns with you from the Brabazons—" with a quick but heavy sigh, "there will be hope in that."

"Don't hope too hard," says Mrs. Monkton, who in truth is feeling a little frightened. To come back *without* Joyce, and encounter an irate young man, with Freddy goodness knows where. "She may have other engage-

ments," she says. She waves him an airy adieu as she makes this cruel suggestion, and with a kiss more hurried than usual to the children, and a good deal of nervousness in her whole manner, runs down the steps to her hansom and disappears.

Felix, thus abandoned, yields himself to the enemy. He gives his right hand to Freddy, and his left to Mabel, and lets them lead him captive into the dining-room.

"I expect dinner is cold," says Tommy cheerfully, seating himself without more ado, and watching Nurse, who is always in attendance at this meal, as she raises the cover from the boiled leg of mutton.

"Oh, no, not yet," says Mr. Dysart quite as cheerfully, raising the carving knife and fork.

Something, however, ominous in the silence that has fallen on both children makes itself felt, and without being able exactly to realize it, he suspends operations for a moment to look at them.

He finds four eyes staring in his direction,

with astonishment, generously mingled with pious horror shining in their clear depths.

“ Eh ? ” says he involuntarily.

“ Aren’t you going to say it ? ” asks Mabel, in a severe tone.

“ Say what ? ” says he.

“ Grace ! ” returns Tommy with distinct disapprobation.

“ Oh—er—Yes, of course. How *could* I have forgotten it ? ” says Dysart spasmodically, laying down the carvers at once, and preparing to distinguish himself. He succeeds admirably !

The children are leaning on the table-cloth in devout expectation, that has something, however, sinister about it. Nurse is looking on, also expectant. Mr. Dysart makes a wild struggle with his memory, but all to no effect. The beginning of various prayers come with malignant readiness to his mind, the ends of several psalms, the middles of a verse or two, but the graces shamelessly desert him in his hour of need.

Good gracious ! What is the usual one, the one they use at home—the—er—— ? He becomes miserably conscious that Tommy's left eye is cocked sideways, and is regarding him with fatal understanding. In a state of desperation he bends forward as low as he well can, wondering vaguely where on earth is his hat, and mumbles something into his plate, that *might* be a bit of a prayer but certainly it is not a grace. Perhaps it is a last cry for help.

"What's that?" demands Tommy promptly.

"I didn't hear one word of it," says Mabel with indignation. Mr. Dysart is too stricken to be able to frame a reply.

"I don't believe you *know* one," continues Tommy, still fixing him with an uncompromising eye. "I don't believe you were saying *anything*. Do you, Nurse ? "

"Oh, fie now, Master Tommy, and I heard your ma telling you you were to be good."

"Well, so I *am* good. 'Tis *he* isn't good. He won't say his prayers *Do* you know

one ? ” turning again to Dysart, who is covered with confusion. What the deuce did he stay here for ? Why didn’t he go to his club ? He could have been back in plenty of time. If that confounded grinning woman of a nurse would only go away it wouldn’t be so bad, but——

“ Never mind,” says Mabel, with calm resignation. “ I’ll say one for you.”

“ No you sha’n’t,” cries Tommy ; “ it’s *my* turn.”

“ No, it isn’t.”

“ It *is*, Mabel. You said it yesterday. And you know you said ‘ relieve ’ instead of ‘ receive,’ and mother laughed, and——”

“ I don’t care. It is Mr. Dysart’s turn, to-day, and he’ll give his to me ; *won’t* you, Mr. Dysart ? ”

“ You’re a greedy thing,” cries Tommy, wrathfully, “ and you *sha’n’t* say it. I’ll tell Mr. Dysart what you did this morning, if you do.”

"I don't care," with disgraceful callousness. "I *will* say it."

"Then I'll say it, too," says Tommy, with sudden inspiration born of a determination to die rather than give in, and instantly four small fat hands are joined in pairs, and two seraphic countenances are upraised, and two shrill voices at screaming pitch, are giving thanks for the boiled mutton, at a racing speed, that censorious people might probably connect with a desire on the part of each to be first in at the finish.

Manfully they fight it out to the bitter end, without a break or a comma, and with defiant eyes glaring at each other across the table. There is a good deal of the grace ; it is quite a long one when usually said, and yet very little grace is in it to-day, when all is told.

" You may go now, Nurse," says Mabel, presently, when the mutton has been removed and Nurse has placed the rice and jam on the table. " Mr. Dysart will attend

to us." It is impossible to describe the grown-up air with which this command is given. It is so like Mrs. Monkton's own voice and manner that Felix, with a start, turns his eyes on the author of it, and Nurse, with an ill-suppressed smile, leaves the room.

"That's what mammy always says when there's only her and me and Tommy," explains Mabel, confidentially. Then, "You," with a doubtful glance, "*you will* attend to us, won't you?"

"I'll do my best," says Felix, in a depressed tone, whose spirits are growing low. After all, there was safety in Nurse!

"I think I'll come up and sit nearer to you," says Tommy affably.

He gets down from his chair and pushes it, creaking hideously, up to Mr. Dysart's elbow—right under it in fact.

"So will I," says Mabel, fired with joy at the prospect of getting away from her proper place, and eating her rice in a forbidden spot.

"But," begins Felix, vaguely, "do you think your mother would——"

"We *always* do it when we're alone with mammy," says Tommy.

"She says it keeps us warm to get under her wing when the weather is cold," says Mabel, lifting a lovely little face to his and bringing her chair down on the top of his toe. "She says it keeps *her* warm, too. Are *you* warm, now?" anxiously.

"Yes, yes—*burning!*" says Mr. Dysart, whose toe is not unconscious of a corn.

"Ah! I knew you'd like it," says Tommy. "Now go on; give us our rice. A *little* rice and a *lot* of jam?"

"Is that what your mother does, too?" asks Mr. Dysart, meanly it must be confessed, but his toe is very bad still. The silence that follows his question and the look of the two downcast little faces is, however, punishment enough.

"Well, so be it," says he. "But even if we *do* finish the jam—I'm awfully fond

of it myself—we must promise faithfully not to be disagreeable about it ; not to be ill, that is."

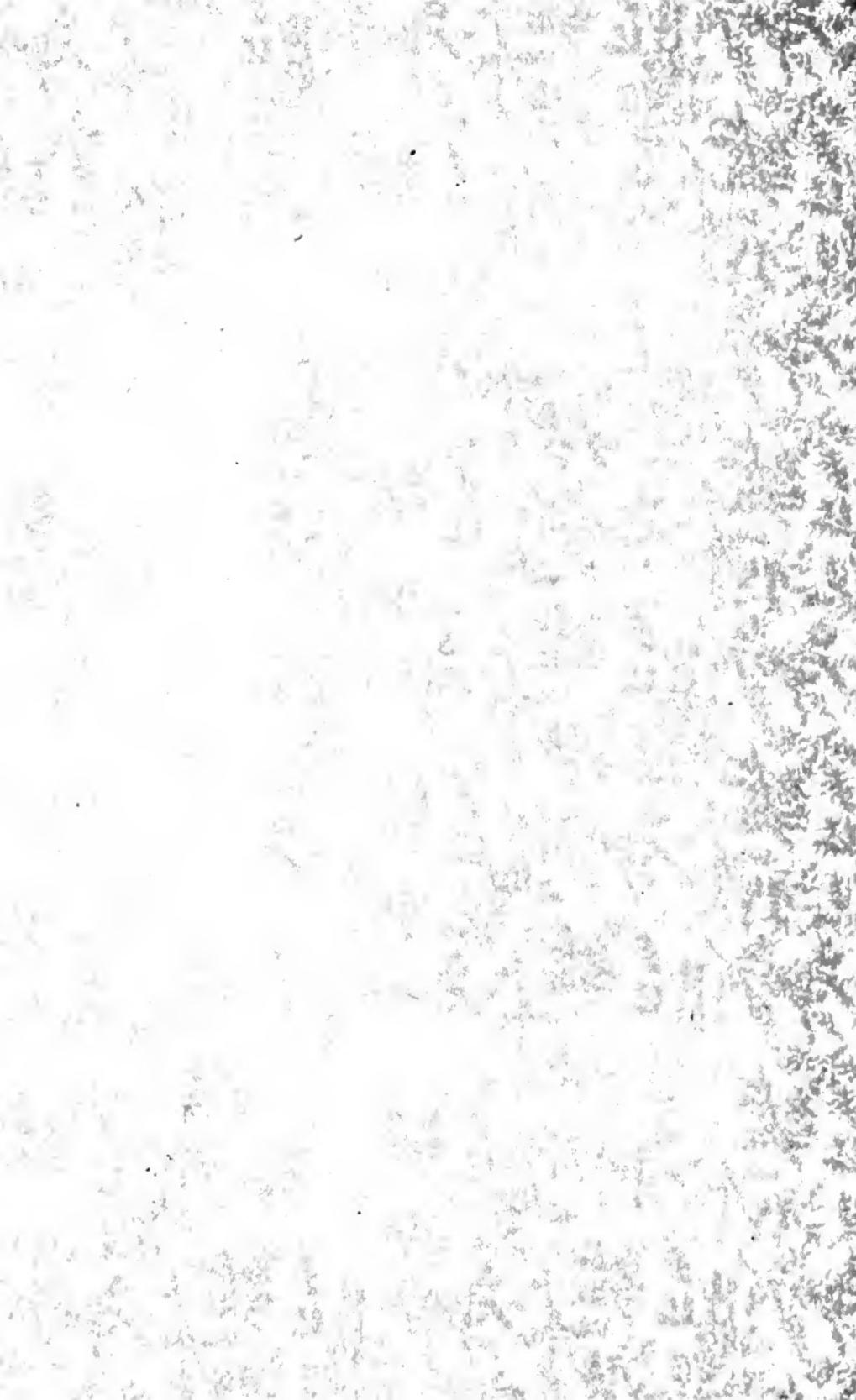
" Ill ! We're never ill," says Tommy valiantly, whereupon they make an end of the jam in no time.

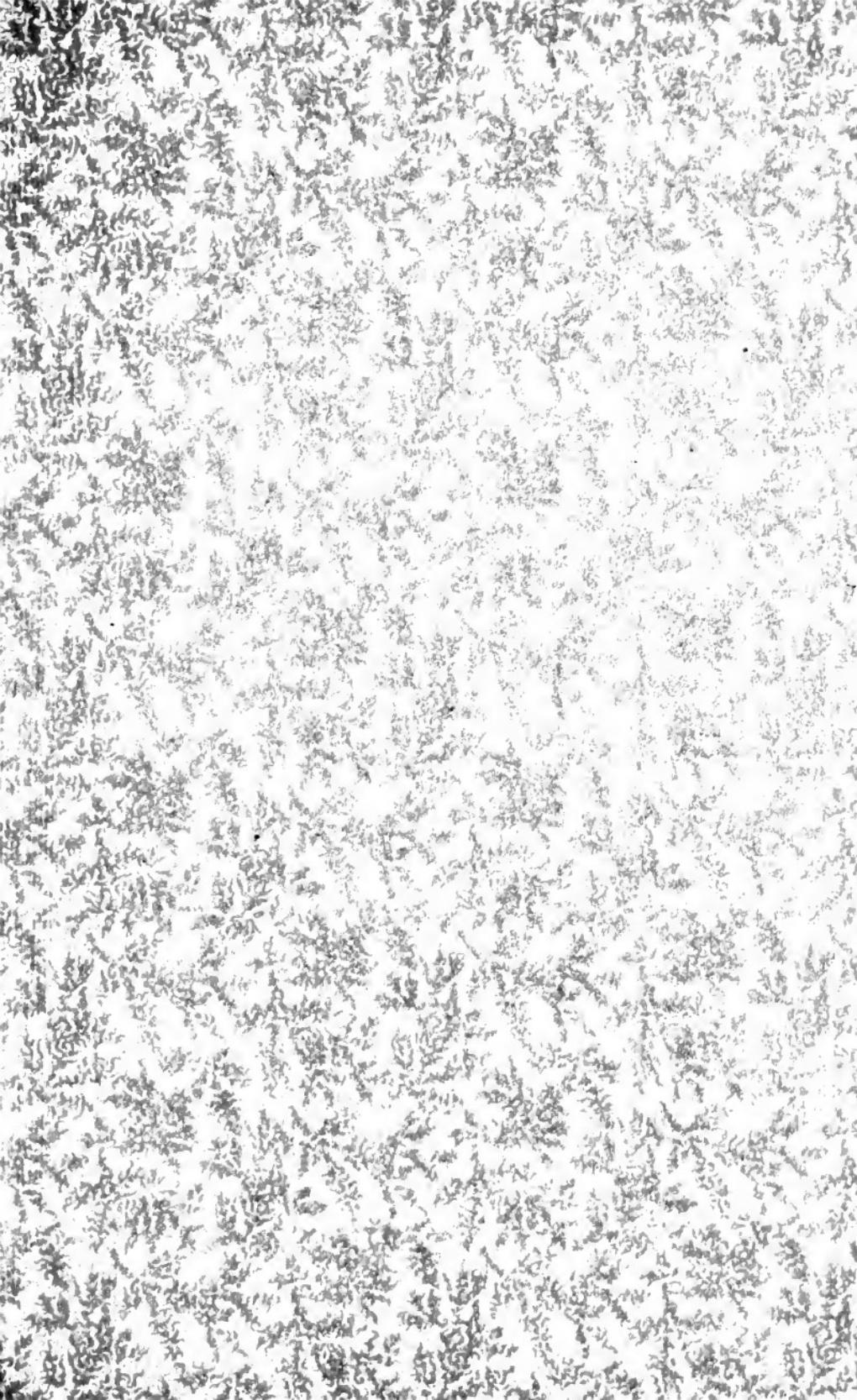
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